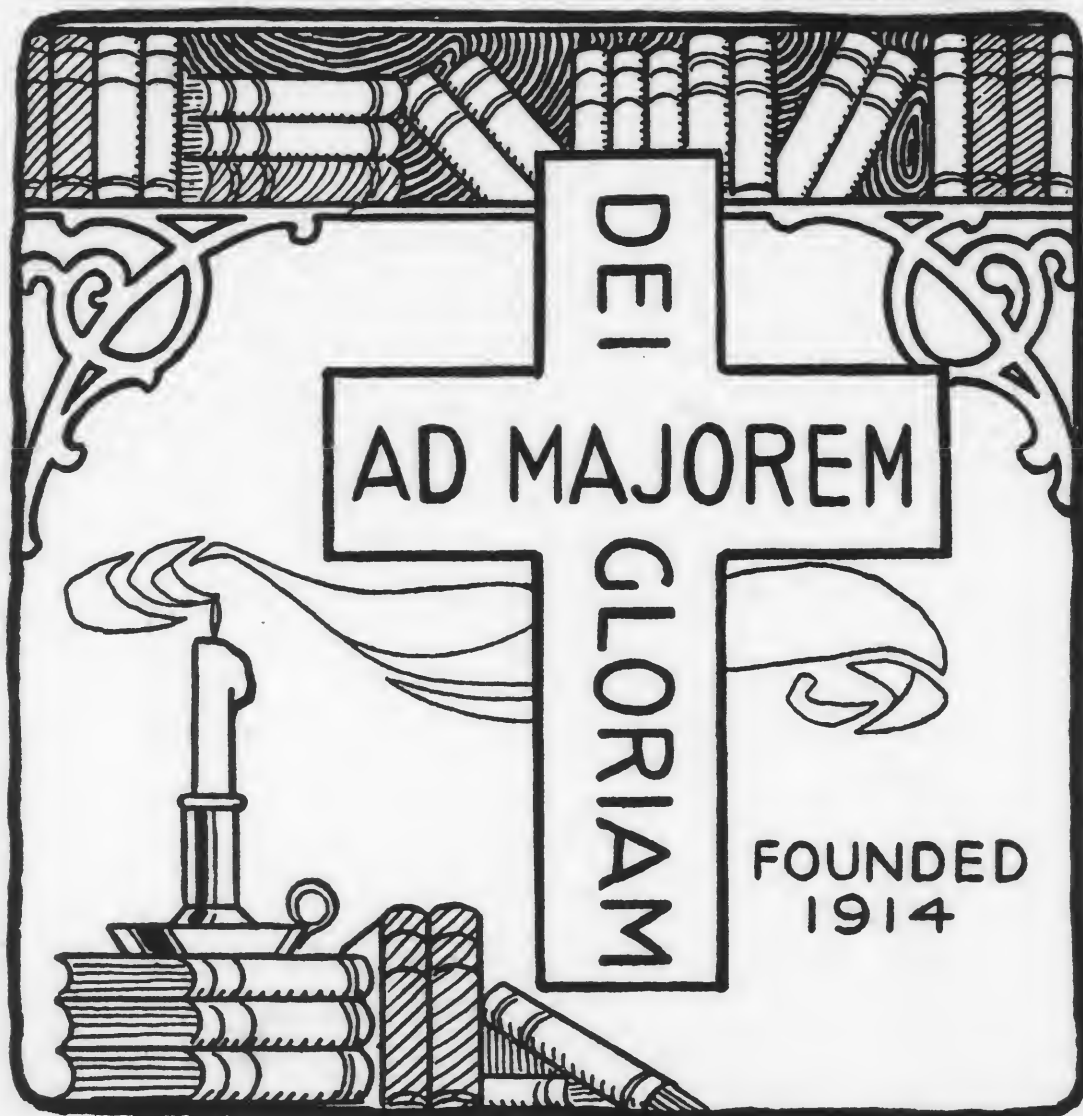


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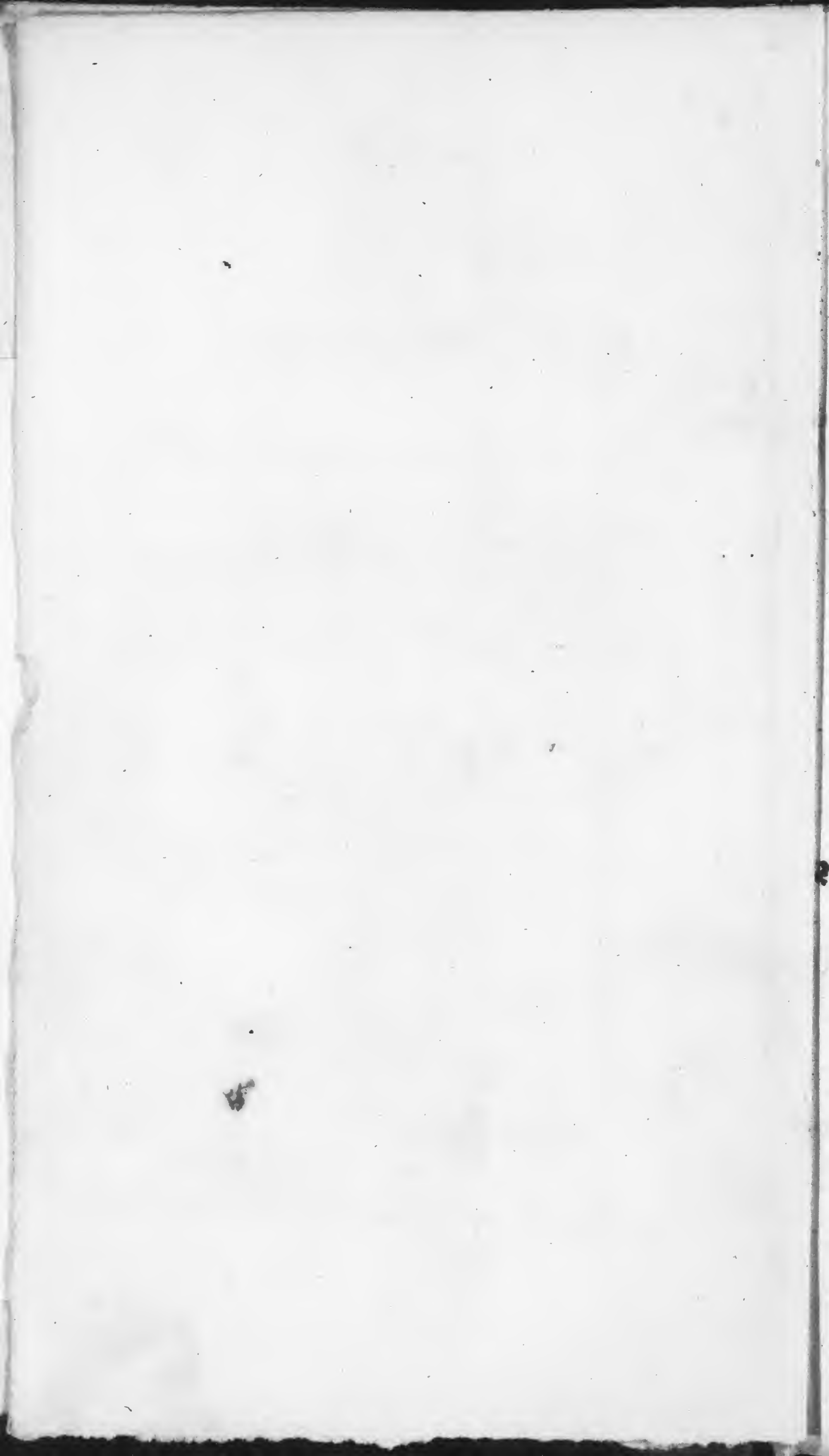


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AN ESSAY
ON
A LAY MINISTRY;

PARTICULARLY ON THAT OF

Wesleyan Local Preachers:

WITH

OBSERVATIONS DESIGNED TO EXHIBIT THE CAPABILITIES AND
MEANS OF IMPROVEMENT AND USEFULNESS POS-
SESSED BY THAT CLASS OF MINISTERS :

BY WILLIAM ROBINSON.

LONDON:

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P R E F A C E .

THE paper on "Punctuality in attending Appointments," was the original of the present Volume.—The idea of writing *that* was suggested by some instances of indefensible negligence, which at the time fell under the Author's notice : some of the other matters on which he has ventured to write, occurred to his mind while meditating on the above subject, and the rest at subsequent intervals.

The Author sincerely avers, that he has never intended to write for the educated, and those who enjoy leisure and superior helps. But he

believes there is a class of young men, who have just entered or are about to enter the Ministry in the capacity of Local Preachers; and whose qualifications and means of improving them are slender, to whom his humble production may not be altogether unsuitable; or read entirely without advantage.

The numerical importance of this description of young preachers, their individual and collective capabilities for improvement and usefulness;—the inadvertence of some of them to the extent of their capabilities, and the need which others have of some stimulus to their efforts—were the impressions under which the following work was commenced.

The writer undertook his task with a strong conviction, that a work of this specific kind, was greatly

needed,—a conviction which experience and observation had combined to produce.

He is sensible that considerable learning and experience were necessary to do the subject justice ;—but while his pretensions to the former are very moderate, he is not wholly destitute of the latter ; having had to struggle with most of the difficulties he has described, and resorted to most of the expedients for their conquest which he has recommended.

W. R.

Rainton, June, 1832.

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AN ESSAY,

&c. &c.

CHAPTER I.

General observations on the ministry of Laymen.

AMONG the benevolent institutions which are the privilege and the honour of our country, there are some that strike us with the peculiar simplicity of their constructure and operations, the generally humble character of the agents they employ, and the absence of any particular grandeur in their single effects. Of this number are the systems of imparting gratuitous instruction to the children of the poor, by means of Sabbath-schools—the diffusion of religious knowledge by the loan of tracts—and of village preaching by the agency of laymen. Each of these forms of christian philanthropy, unpretending as it is, and claiming little that is venerable in antiquity, illustrious in talent, or powerful in influence, must nevertheless be ranked among the most efficient of any in existence.

It may appear surprising, that these modes of

doing good, which are prosecuted at so small an expense of time, property, or learning, should be so efficacious ; but it is apparently still more paradoxical that the very circumstance of their independence on these endowments should be the principal cause of their efficiency. But the fact is, their simplicity adapting itself to common faculties, secures for them an instrumentality which more than supplies by its numerical, what it lacks in individual importance. That system of benevolence which is dependent on wealth, learning, and leisure, must be necessarily limited in its efficacy, because these are talents which but few possess ; but the institutions we have named, can number among their efficient agents the poor, the comparatively illiterate, and the man of business ; and of these the number may be multiplied almost incalculably. These institutions, therefore, are powerful, not by the force of talent or of single efforts, but by a vast combination of talent and effort—feeble, it may be, separately considered, but mighty in their union ;—and thus what they want in the intensity of their influence, is compensated by the amplitude of its diffusion.

In another view we may remark, that the charities in question, depending chiefly on the virtue of the middle classes of society, are much more secure of support than if resting on the virtue of the higher orders ; for it is among the former that virtue and piety are principally to be found, or found in a vigorous and influential state.

These remarks, it is presumed, are strictly applicable to the system of preaching by persons in a laical capacity. The individuals thus employed, are generally allowed to form one of the most useful classes in society: but their usefulness, deriving little aid from wealth, learning, or leisure, is on that account humble and unobtrusive in its external character.

Of this auxiliary kind of ministry most Dissenting Churches at present avail themselves; although none to any considerable extent except the Wesleyans. Among this body the system is established on a wide and regular scale, and its beneficial results are incalculably great. By means of lay preachers thousands of the "poor have the Gospel preached to them;" nor could their services be discontinued without the most serious injury to the cause. The general character of the Wesleyan local preachers is highly creditable to the connexion, while numbers among them are possessed of superior talents and piety.

Doubts, we are aware, exist in the minds of some relative to the abstract propriety, or scriptural authority of a lay ministry. Perhaps these doubts originate in the apprehension that the sanctity and difficulty of the sacred office are inconsistent with its being assumed by uneducated and secular characters.

Now, it is not for a moment imagined, that the regular and *official* ministry ought, or ever will be, superseded by the occasional labours of local

preachers;* or that the latter *can* ever be an adequate substitute for the former. We are convinced that there ought to be a regular and successive supply of ministers, who are possessed of more extensive learning than men in business can ordinarily have the means of acquiring: for it would be a reproach and an injury to religion if its professed advocates were inferior in this respect to its enemies. Add to this the multifarious and important duties connected with the pastorship and superintendence of the Church can, in most cases, only be efficiently discharged by those who are wholly devoted to the work. But all this admitted, it by no means follows, that local preachers may not be useful auxiliaries. If it can be proved that they are not ministers or pastors in the full sense of the word, still it cannot be disproved that they may occasionally discharge some of the duties of pastors. The exclusive labours of an ordained ministry furnish no more argument against the utility or necessity of the occasional labours of lay preachers, than the exclusive appropriation of the sabbath day to sacred uses, does against the propriety and utility of holding religious services on some other days of the week.

• The term *local preacher*, for an obvious reason, is exclusively methodistical, and would be absurdly applied to the lay preachers of those sects whose regular ministers are local. The author, however, will find it convenient sometimes to employ the term, and occasionally to make direct allusions to the body of men of whom it is a distinctive and well known appellation. Generally, however, the term is used simply as a designation of a lay preacher, and not with an exclusive reference to the Wesleyan local preacher.

The Apostle divides the servants of the church into a variety of orders. "God hath set some in the church, first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers, after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."—1 Cor. xii. 28. Now, though lay preachers claim no "apostleship," or "government," yet they may perhaps be allowed to possess the humbler appellation of "teachers," or "helps." Helps to the regular ministry they may very appropriately be styled; for abundantly as this highly-favoured country is supplied with evangelical ministers of various denominations, still the field of labour is too extensive for their united efforts, and very much of it remains but partially or not at all cultivated. It is certain that but for the labours of local preachers, many hundreds of country congregations would be unable to hear one sermon in the week, without being obliged to travel several miles; and to the aged and infirm this would amount to a total deprivation.

"But is it not," some will ask, "dishonourable to the sacred office, for a person to hold it in conjunction with one that is secular, and to mix its duties with temporal business?" It is, doubtless, on several accounts, highly desirable that a preacher of the Gospel should be detached from business;—and yet we have scriptural authority for believing, that this is not in every case absolutely necessary. The Apostle Paul contends for the right of ministers to support, and "to forbear working." "Even so," says he, "hath the Lord ordained, that they

who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." Yet the same Apostle occasionally wrought at his trade of tent making. He did this at Corinth, as we are informed in the eighteenth chapter of the Acts. Here he found a certain christian Jew, named Aquilla, of the same craft with himself, "and he abode with him and wrought" on the week days, "and he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath." Necessity, no doubt, compelled him to resort to his trade; and the love of Christ, and of souls, constrained him to preach on the sabbath day; and these are precisely the reasons on which most lay preachers act in a similar manner.

In another place, the same Apostle, comparing the christian minister to a soldier, says, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." This general assertion, we may observe, like many others of a similar kind, must be understood with some exceptions. Generally speaking, soldiers are, and must be, disentangled from common concerns; and yet in most countries there are volunteers, or a *local* militia, whose services, though not splendid, are often valuable in maintaining internal peace and security. In this light must a lay ministry be viewed. They, of course, cannot be expected to be so expert in the use of their spiritual weapons, as those who are educated for and solely employed in the office. Yet there are posts to occupy in the warfare with sin and satan, to which their abilities are by no means unequal. If it would be imprudent in them to en-

counter a disciplined army, they may be competent to face a mob ; if they cannot go on foreign service, they can find abundant employment at home ; and, in fine, while they strengthen the grand force, they are no encumbrance to the public revenue.

Abstractedly, there is nothing in lawful business to desecrate the holiest character or employment.— If business does not disqualify a person from holding converse with God in the closet, it surely cannot disqualify him for addressing his fellow sinners from the pulpit.

Our first parents, in their paradisiacal state, were possessed of a higher degree of sanctity than any of their fallen posterity ; yet they were employed in “ dressing and keeping the garden ”—a mean employment according to modern taste.

Necessity is the very commanding reason of the lay preacher’s engaging in secular business ; and we are not aware of any other plea that could justify him in so doing. Those who receive a reasonably sufficient maintenance for their pastoral labours, degrade their character and office by embarking in any kind of business : but then it is not the business itself that degrades, but the grovelling, earthly-minded motive that prompts them to it—the guilt of straying from the sphere of duty in which God has placed them—the injustice of robbing the people, whose “ carnal things ” they receive, of their time and attention.

Freedom from worldly business is an unspeakable advantage to a minister, and happy is he who duly appreciates and improves this advantage.

Nevertheless the engagements of secular duties are not in all respects disadvantageous to a preacher. The consumption of time they occasion may prevent him from becoming skilful on doctrinal and speculative points ; but in the discussion of practical subjects, he will often derive considerable assistance from his practical experience. In his secular intercourse with mankind, he will be enabled to see human nature in a truer light than he could do if constantly immured in the study, and rarely conversing with men except in his pastoral character, where he would see people to the best advantage, and often in a borrowed garb. In the discharge of ordinary duties also, he has an opportunity of exemplifying many virtues of a higher and more difficult character, and on a wider scale than he could do if wholly disengaged from business ;— and can therefore describe them with the precision and enforce them with the confidence which experience only can impart.

It may further be remarked, that though a lay preacher be unable to embellish his sermons with learned criticisms and classical allusions, he may be able to illustrate many of his subjects by allusions to the common facts and phenomena of the existing world, with which his ordinary engagements have made him familiar ; and this latter is a mode of preaching highly calculated to be useful, and altogether conformable to the manner in which our blessed Saviour and his Apostles instructed mankind. Many of our Lord's parables are founded on well-known customs, and the obvious phe-

nomena of nature ; and in the explication of them, an accurate knowledge of common things, is of far more avail than extraordinary erudition. Thus from the parable of the "sower" an intelligent farmer might preach an accurate and learned sermon ; while a professor of classical or oriental literature might feel himself greatly embarrassed on the subject.

Another advantage peculiar to a lay ministry is, that its *unchargeableness* permits its unlimited expansion. The multiplication of a salaried ministry, is necessarily bounded by the pecuniary means and the generosity of the people ; but these are no measures whatever of the multiplication of gratuitous labourers : and this is no unimportant matter to the poor inhabitants of many country places. It appears, indeed, to be the special business of local preachers, to preach the Gospel to the poor ; and they ought always to give the poor the advantage of their labours, in preference to the rich ; because these can provide for themselves, whereas the other must have the bread of life *literally* "without money and without price." And as the local preacher receives no more compensation from the rich than from the poor, he can afford to preach to the one quite as well as to the other.

Now this is a consideration in which the preacher himself may be permitted to indulge a very honest satisfaction. Amidst his manifold discouragements and the neglect with which his labours are sometimes regarded by the more respectable class of hearers, he has the consolation of being acquitted

both by them and his own heart of mercenary motives ; and of being assured that if they do not deem his discourses very valuable, they cannot complain that they are expensive ; that if destitute of high attractions, yet such as they are he gives them for nothing ; and that, while he can accommodate the poor, he is independent on the rich.

But while the freeness of his ministry may innocently be a source of satisfaction, it must not be a subject of boasting, or a fancied ground of superiority. He must be aware that the circumstance of its freeness is only a blessing to the poor, but none at all to those who can afford to support a ministry. The contribution of one's property to this very rational and scriptural purpose, should be deemed a privilege, as furnishing him with an opportunity of testifying his gratitude for so great a benefit : it is also *morally* beneficial, by calling into exercise some of the best feelings of his heart ; and by identifying the success of the Gospel with his interest, even increasing his value for that which costs him something. Those who prefer a gratuitous ministry because they dislike to part with their money, are despicable beings ; and never likely to profit by that which they rate so cheap.

But an objection that may be thought still more weighty against the preaching of laymen, is grounded on their general want of education. It is admitted that some are to be found among them who are destitute of suitable qualifications—a concession which, however, must be made with reference to every other body of ministers. Cases of

this kind may be more numerous amongst local preachers than others: but none are entitled to so much candour and forbearance.

It is also allowed, that few among them are possessed of extensive learning; and to this deficiency we are willing to grant its full bulk of importance. Nevertheless, with profound respect for learning, popularly so called, and a deep conviction of its utility to a christian minister, we may venture to affirm, that it is not an essential qualification for the work of preaching the Gospel. In every art and profession, some qualifications are of essential and others only of secondary importance. The indispensable qualifications of a christian preacher are a true conversion to God; the enjoyment of the love of God as the ruling principle of the soul; irreproachable morals; a sound understanding, improved by reading and study; a comprehensive knowledge of christian theology, particularly with the vital doctrines connected with redemption, and the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart; an intimate acquaintance with satan's devices and the world's allurements, and especially with the human heart; and finally, such a command of language and facility of utterance as will suffice to exhibit the thoughts with perspicuity and acceptance. The possession of classical and scientific knowledge, in addition to these endowments, is highly desirable and important: but, if we are not mistaken, the enumeration just given, includes every thing that is *essential* to constitute a christian preacher. Such were the only qualifications of nearly all the primi-

tive teachers of Christianity, as well as of great numbers of the most successful preachers in every age. Every subsidiary and ornamental accomplishment should be sought by a preacher as he has opportunity; but none should be despised for the want of what is chiefly ornamental, if he is possessed of that which is essentially useful, and especially if his circumstances be unfavourable to improvement.

Some men possess considerable genius and great practical talent, with very small scientific attainments. Examples of this are to be found in every profession, and every department of arts and business. Such persons must, of course, labour under considerable disadvantages: their general principles will be few and contracted, and sometimes considerably erroneous; yet it would be as absurd to affirm that the talent they possess ought not to be exercised, as it would be false to deny its existence.

Examples in verification of this fact are to be met with amongst preachers. Many of these are destitute of classical learning, and know little of polite literature, and yet have considerable genius and practical talent; they can preach so as to convince the understanding, affect the heart, and arouse the conscience; and possessing thus the ability to accomplish the main end of their calling, who will venture to pronounce them unqualified? The value of learning is to be estimated by its practical utility. The possession of that learning that is foreign to a man's profession or calling, is practically useless.

Some men of great power and versatility of intellect attempt the acquisition of a great many branches of learning; and though their collective acquirements may be prodigious, yet rarely are they pre-eminent in any one thing. Others with minds much inferior, and sensible perhaps of their inability to grasp many things at once, wisely direct all their faculties and efforts to excel in one science or profession; and these often become more useful, and even more celebrated than the man of profound science and multifarious acquirements. Sir Edward Coke and Lord Bacon were contemporary lawyers, none will doubt that the latter had a mind incomparably more powerful than the former; yet Coke, by confining his meaner powers solely to the study of law, has become a more celebrated lawyer, and the works he has left behind him, will remain an imperishable monument of his industry and correct legal knowledge. In illustration of this fact, we may observe, that there are Christian preachers, whom it would be easy to name, who have launched out into the great and wide sea of science, and become men of general and profound erudition; yet as preachers, they are far outshone by many who have not half their learning:—the reason is, the latter have concentrated all their faculties and endeavours in the single object of the composition and delivery of sermons.

If these remarks be just, then they will authorize us to affirm that local preachers, of ordinary opportunities and capacity, though they cannot aspire to the rank of scholars, may not unreasonably aim at

that of preachers; and that the prudent and diligent use of their time and opportunities, will enable them to become — “workmen that need not be ashamed.”

It is to be recollected also, that lay preachers form but a subordinate or auxiliary order of ministers, and have seldom to address persons of remarkable intelligence and refinement; their peculiar business, as has already been stated, is, to preach the Gospel to the literal poor: now these people have rarely any taste for refined criticism, or elegant diction; they have little capacity for philosophical disquisition, or argumentation long and laboured: they want plain truth, exhibited in familiar language; they require clear ideas, delivered in short, pointed sentences. The great truths of the Gospel are few and simple; and as they are easy to be comprehended, so they are not hard to be stated and explained by those that feel their importance and efficacy. Indeed experience, *intellectually* considered, is an admirable qualification of a preacher, and an essential one in the discussion of experimental subjects. To common people, experience is all important: learned discourses are lost upon them, but from a person who can do little else but relate his experience of the operations of divine grace on his heart, they will derive the most substantial edification.

The Wesleyan lay preachers form an essential part of the Wesleyan constitution. It is the nursery and school of the itinerancy: from their ranks fresh recruits for the regulars are from time

to time drafted. This circumstance attaches to the younger class of local preachers a peculiar importance, and should furnish them with a distinct and powerful motive to diligence in improving their talents: for the intellectual habits and attainments they acquire while in this capacity, will form the stamina of their character as itinerants, and often determine the rank they will hold in that wider and more important sphere of labour. In a word, with local preachers is placed the most efficient remedy for the disadvantages arising from the want of a ministerial education.*

* That this is a defect in the system cannot well be denied. At the same time, from the unexampled spread of Methodism, or of Christianity by its means, and the generally respectable character and talents of its ministers, we might be led to believe that the practical disadvantages resulting from this circumstance are not so formidable as might be supposed.

The truth is, the young Itinerant, while he has sufficient means of acquiring a knowledge of divinity and general literature, has the very best opportunity of improving his preaching talents, by his incessant public exercises. He learns to use his arms, not in the lecture room, but in the field; and hence, though he may sometimes use them unscientifically, yet none are more rarely charged with wielding them ineffectually.

If the first three or four years of his ministry were spent in an academy, he might obtain the elements of a better education; but it is not probable that he would thereby become a more useful, or even a more popular preacher. Many of the sciences studied at those seats of learning are but remotely connected with theology, or even elocution; and perpetual application to abstract studies, if not accompanied with considerable practice in public speaking, has a tendency to impair the readiness and vivacity of conception, and the flexibility of style and ease of delivery, which are of the utmost importance to a public speaker.

But passing by this ulterior reason, the lay preachers of the Wesleyan and other denominations must on account of their own labours, in conjunction with the circumstances of their great and increasing numbers, exercise a very considerable influence on the moral character of society. That influence, it is evident, will be extensive and beneficial, in proportion to their piety, their respectability of character, and ministerial talents and zeal. To promote these is the object of the present work. We have for some time looked in vain for a work on this precise subject; that is, one professedly adapted for the benefit of this valuable class of men. None certainly need counsel and encouragement more than they: and they want counsel of a peculiar kind. The local preacher is in very different circumstances from the salaried pastor. He has difficulties to struggle with to which the latter is a stranger. He has to attend to the cultivation of his mind and the composition of his sermons amidst the bustle of traffic, the weariness of labour, and often the endless anxieties of straitened circumstances. Perhaps he lives in an obscure village, without any literary or religious friend from whose conversation and fellowship, he might derive improvement and resolution. He has probably a scanty library, with small means

Oratory, like Poetry, cannot be learned like other things; it is the child of nature and inspiration. The range of imagination, the glow of animation and feeling, and the pathos of delivery, may be corrected, but cannot be *created* by rules and systems.

of enlarging it ; and yet scanty as it is, he may have scarcely time to possess himself of its humble lore.

That a man in these circumstances should sink under discouragement, and make small advances in knowledge and pulpit ability, is not at all surprising ; and this, in fact, not unfrequently occurs ;—and unquestionably nothing but very spiritual and elevated views, a rare moral courage and self control, united with indefatigable industry, can enable any one to overcome these formidable difficulties. But the thing has been accomplished in thousands of instances ; and what has been accomplished by one, may be hopefully attempted by another.

The benefit of young preachers in circumstances similar to those just described, is the principal object sought in the following pages. We are anxious to impress the minds of those individuals with the solemn responsibility of the office they have taken upon them, and the value and absolute necessity of piety and zeal, of knowledge, and the gift of utterance to the successful discharge of its duties. We seek to convince them that their few and scanty means of improvement, if carefully husbanded, will be found productive beyond their calculation ; that *moderate* industry, judiciously applied and steadily persisted in, will soon qualify them to be “workmen that need not be ashamed,” and ultimately leave them but little reason to regret the want of ampler opportunities.

In a word, we wish to convince them, that ample leisure, and an ample library to occupy it, are

neither, nor both of them, so important as *an intense desire for wisdom* : for when the latter exists, it will always find or invent means of achieving its object, whereas the other alone, is but “a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, who has no heart to it.”

CHAPTER II.

Preparatory Qualifications.

THE business of a preacher of the Gospel, generally speaking, is to expound, defend, and enforce, the sacred truths of God's Holy Word—the doctrines and duties, the penalties and privileges, of **Revealed Religion**. The being and perfections of God—the apostacy and guilt of the human race—and the degeneracy and wickedness of the human character—the divine character and redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ—the extent and sufficiency of his atonement—its privileges, namely, pardon, adoption, the witness of the Spirit, purity of heart, and victory over all sin, present happiness, and eternal life : also repentance, faith, and the faithful improvement of the means of grace, as the terms on which we are admitted to a participation of the blessings of **Redemption** : the influence of the Holy Spirit in the work of **Regeneration** : the necessity of practical holiness, or a conscientious regard to the moral precepts of the divine law : the solemn consideration of man's accountability, especially in its bearing on the judgment day : the everlasting rewards of the righteous, and the interminable punishment awaiting the finally impenitent—these, with their collateral and kindred subjects,

are the themes on which the Christian preacher must expatiate, and of which he is required to shew the scriptural authority, and practical bearing ;—to exhibit them to the understanding, and enforce them upon the conscience.

Efficiently to discharge this duty is a work of no ordinary magnitude ; it is worthy to engage, and mighty even to task the most exalted talents. No one certainly is authorized to attempt it who do not possess certain specific qualifications. These preparatory qualifications are of two kinds, natural and moral, each of which possesses a distinct and essential importance.

Unhappily we have observed in some systems of Church government one or other of these different, but equally necessary classes of ministerial endowments valued and sought to the neglect of the other. Thus some, while they attach great and proper importance to a sound conversion, a blameless life, and the manifestation of a lively and indefatigable zeal, are chargeable with a very culpable disregard of learning and pulpit talents. While others appear to imagine that none are authorized to preach the Gospel but those who are classically learned and episcopally ordained : this opinion would be less objectionable, but for the fact that the Church with whom it is almost peculiar, have, in general, manifested a deplorable indifference relative to the piety and moral character of its candidates for the ministry. Both these are fatal errors. An ignorant

ministry is absurd ; an ungodly one shocking ; the former will be useless—the latter mischievous.*

* Complaints have been made that the door of admission into the local ministry of the Wesleyans—so far at least as pulpit talents are concerned—is often too accessible and unguarded ; that candidates are sometimes received on insufficient recommendation, and without being subjected to a regular test, or to any test by which their abilities would be fairly ascertained. These allegations are not wholly unfounded, as would appear from the fact, that the idea of becoming a preacher is admitted as a matter of course, by nearly every young man who becomes pious among the Methodists ; and that not a few succeed in the assumption of the office, whose incapacity is glaring and obviously unimproveable, and whose crude and chaotic effusions are calculated much more to injure than to advance the cause of religion, and, in a word, whose very existence in the capacity of preachers is discreditable alike to themselves and to the judgment of those who have been their advisers.

This evil, however, is not believed to be universally prevalent in the Methodist Connexion ; as in many Circuits—we would hope in most—the requisite circumspection in the admission of preachers upon the Plan is carefully exercised. And from such circumspection a two-fold benefit is seen to result ; it operates not only in the exclusion of improper characters, but in the excitement of those who are possessed of real talents and piety, to more animated efforts in the improvement of both, and by these means it strongly tends to uphold the credit and efficiency of the local preachers as a body.

Specious arguments, we are aware, have been adduced in favour of a less restricted method of calling out preachers. “ The danger of sinners,” it is said, “ is urgent and fearful ; the people are perishing for lack of the bread of life ; while there are comparatively few to dispense it ; the destroyer of souls is committing fearful depredations, and the soldiers of the cross are yet but a small army ; the harvest is great, and the labourers are few ; and in this demand for effort, it were surely unwise to reject even the aid of the feeble, when they cheerfully tender it, and are most anxious for its acceptance ;” The truth of all these positions is allowed ; but they have no hostile bearing on our views of the subject in question. A general might find his army too small to continue the war with a reasonable

In proceeding with the subject, we remind the reader that it is *preparatory qualifications* to which we now refer; not those that a preacher is expected to acquire *subsequently* to his entering upon the work, but those without which he is not justified in entering upon it at all.

Of natural abilities, we observe first, that *a sound understanding* should be possessed by all who undertake the office of a preacher.

The natural capacity of mankind presents a striking diversity: the intelligence of some men is originally vigorous, capable of vast improvement, and arduous achievements; while that of others seems incurably feeble, contracted and superficial, capable only of very narrow enlargement, and very ordinary services. Now, though it would be improper to affirm that none but minds of the first order are capable of discharging the functions of a Christian preacher; yet certainly the office should

hope of success, and consequently be induced to send for reinforcements; but whatever might be the scarcity of soldiers, and his need of aid, he would not accept a promiscuous crowd of persons, many of whom were positively incapable of becoming soldiers. If a farmer saw his grounds neglected, and barren for want of culture, he might desire an accession of labourers, yet he would not wish to see his fields supplied with persons who were entire strangers to agricultural labours. On similar principles we must maintain that the pulpit efforts of unqualified persons are useless to men and unacceptable to God. He who cannot rightly divide the word of truth, nor be heard by a person of ordinary intelligence and candour, without disgust, will do more harm than good. And furthermore, there are so many ways of doing good beside that of preaching, that no person of real piety, however small his talents, can want scope for his energies, although he never take a text, or mount a pulpit.

not be assumed by any who do not rank above the lowest. The understanding of a preacher should be sound and discriminating, able to distinguish truth from error, and to frame and conduct an argument; he should have an imagination that would enable him to illustrate the obscurities and enliven the dulness of his subject. To this it may be added also, that his elocution should, at least, be free from incurable defects, and his acquaintance with language such as to enable him intelligibly to deliver his sentiments.

These natural qualifications, in ordinary cases, will have given sufficient notice of their existence previous to any attempt at public speaking. To this position there are indeed exceptions: the first attempts of some popular preachers have been far from promising or satisfactory: some have also commenced with formidable organic impediments, which, by care and diligence, they have been enabled entirely to surmount. In doubtful cases, therefore, nothing but a trial can elicit the truth; and a single trial may be insufficient; but if the gift be there, it will speedily discover itself, often indeed, in a rude state or as a very feeble germ, yet still recognizable by the judicious hearer. But if a few trials produce no satisfactory results; if the individual display no genius for elucidating a text, or framing a sermon; if his divisions and arrangements be unnatural and improper, his arguments feeble, illogical, and injudicious; in a word, if his text and his discourse have little obvious connexion, it may be pretty surely concluded that the Great

Head of the Church has not called him to discharge the important functions of a preacher, and happy will that individual be if he has some kind friend to apprise him of the unwelcome truth, and recommend him to choose some other path of pious exertion, more suited to his abilities. Such an act of friendship is often greatly necessary ; because these talentless persons have rarely discernment enough to know their own defects, and if uninterrupted, often persist in their blundering career, to the great grief and disgust of all that hear them, and the serious injury of the cause of religion.

A naturally sound judgment and a preaching genius have often been strikingly developed in persons, whose minds have been wholly uncultivated and barren of general knowledge. Such persons, if pious, should be recommended to cherish the intention of becoming preachers, and, on a small scale, to exercise their talents ; but they should be distinctly and strongly assured that *a comprehensive knowledge of the system of divine Truth as revealed in the Scriptures*, is a qualification without which no person should presume to enter the pulpit.— This knowledge they should therefore be directed to seek by a prayerful and diligent perusal of the Word of God, and of such books as are calculated to assist them in ascertaining its truths. It is an insult to common sense and to religion, an outrage on decency, for an ignorant person to enter the pulpit. He who undertakes to be a preacher, assumes the character of a public instructor, and it were to the last degree ridiculous for one to assume

that character who is ignorant of that which he professes to teach, stupidity must be added to ignorance, to enable a man to brave the contempt which must thus be drawn upon him. Ignorance, vanity, and impudent boldness, united as they often are, are provoking to the most patient, and disgusting to the rudest taste.

But there are *moral* qualifications indispensable to a preacher of the Gospel, of equal if not superior importance to those that are natural.

Every person before he enters upon the sacred work, should be reconciled to his God. For a minister is an ambassador for Christ, employed by him to negotiate with his rebellious creatures ;—to proclaim their guilt and danger, propose the terms of salvation, and entreat them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God.

Now as no sovereign would employ a *criminal* as an ambassador or judge, or in any other confidential capacity, so it is difficult to believe that the Supreme and Universal Sovereign would intrust the "Ministry of reconciliation" to one who is in a state of guilt and unbelief. For how can a person in such circumstances rightly discharge the duties of this ministry? He might, indeed, denounce the terrors of the law ; but how can he pronounce the accents of mercy, or expatiate on the love of the Redeemer, and on his ability and willingness to save? Himself a stranger to the consolations of the Gospel, all his attempts to administer to others the cordial of Gospel promises must be heartless, cold, and forced.

Inseparably connected with justification, and equally indispensable as a ministerial qualification, is that great moral change which, in the Scripture, is distinguished by the terms “regeneration,” “the new birth,” “sanctification,” and “the circumcision of the heart.” The change or process of which these phrases are severally expressive, is produced in the heart by the agency of the Holy Spirit : it is a transition from darkness to light, from enmity to friendship, from a state of guilt and sin, to a state of purity and peace. In other words, the state of mind resulting from this renovating operation consists in just and scriptural views of our character, our duty and our condition with respect to God and eternity. It includes also that purity and spirituality of heart in which God is the object of our supreme affection and adoring reverence—we love him as the best, and adore him as the greatest of beings : at the same time, while our attachment to all earthly things is regulated by their intrinsic value and their influence on our happiness, it is always of a sober and subordinate character. This divine principle extinguishes every selfish and malignant feeling—it invariably produces humility, gentleness, and universal good-will. In fine, from being carnal and worldly in all our desires and pursuits, we become, in a prevailing degree, spiritual and heavenly. The change in the conduct always corresponds with this change of the heart ; as the fruit must partake of the nature of the tree, so the conduct necessarily accords with the state of the affections. A person who is “born again”

considers obedience to the will of God as the only source of his happiness ; and hence a regard to his own interest unites with a principle of grateful love, to dispose him to active obedience and cheerful submission to the will of God. He hates sin because it is injurious to himself and abominable to God, he faithfully improves and employs all his mental and bodily faculties for the benefit of his fellow-creatures, both from " respect to the recompense of reward," and from a principle of pure and exalted philanthropy. In short, " the grace of God has taught him to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world."

That a conversion producing such a purity of heart and life, must be an indispensable preparation for the ministry, is too evident to be for a moment questioned : for what can be more absurd than for a man to undertake to make converts of others, who is not a convert himself.

An unconverted person may indeed be a learned divine, and an eloquent preacher ; he may have a profound and critical knowledge of the system of revealed Truth, and be able to defend it against the cavils of infidels with masterly ability ; but, after all, his want of christian experience will essentially incapacitate him for preaching the Gospel with success. The influence of the Spirit in the great process of regeneration cannot be understood, or its vast importance felt, without the aid of experience, and without experience it cannot be explained to others with that clearness that shall

produce conviction, or its advantages urged with that warmth that would affect the heart, and lead to conversion.

The sermons of an unconverted man may possess great literary merit; but in the vital truths of Christianity, they will be indistinct in exposition, and frigid in application; like the *picture* of some building, which gives us indeed a pretty correct view of its magnitude and external shape, but leaves us in perfect ignorance of its internal arrangements and furniture.

Let a person who is experimentally unacquainted with the principle of divine love, undertake to write a comment, or compose a sermon on the thirteenth Chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, and he will soon be convinced that it requires *moral* as well as natural endowments to make a divine.

The judgment may yield to the force of argument while the heart remains unmoved and the purpose unaltered;—the latter can only be accomplished by the persuasion of motives. But the power of persuasion is possessed only by those who are deeply interested in the subject of discourse, who have an ardent love of the truths they inculcate, and an experimental acquaintance with their value. Here, then, the deficiency of the carnal minister will be detected; he does not feel the value and authority of divine truth, his preaching must therefore be necessarily heartless and unpersuasive; it may amuse by its ingenuity, or amaze by its brilliancy, but like the luminaries of night, it will diffuse no warmth.

But if we even suppose that the sermons of such a person are as impressive as they are luminous ;— if we allow him to possess all the power of persuasion that eloquence can impart, yet his practical inconsistency would neutralize its force. Without supposing him to be chargeable with flagrant immorality, the bare suspicion entertained by his hearers of his sincerity and the genuineness of his piety, would bar the avenues of conviction : his statements would be received with distrust, his appeals meet with scorn and indignation, and his words would seem to freeze upon his lips. And still more hopeless would be his efforts to do good, if his outward tempers and conduct were notoriously unchristian : in that case, his preaching would rarely profit any, and would certainly injure all.— The pious would be grieved, the simple confounded, the weak overturned, the hypocrite patronized and hardened, and the infidel confirmed in his unbelief.

In conclusion, we may venture to affirm, that no unconverted man can rationally or scripturally believe himself called to the work of the ministry, because he must be aware that he is not and cannot be influenced by proper motives. A disinterested love to the souls of his fellow-creatures, and an ardent desire for their salvation, together with a single and fixed purpose of pleasing God, are principles to which he knows himself to be an utter stranger. All his views are carnal and worldly. Ambition, avarice, or both, must neces-

sarily be his only incentives to action. It cannot therefore be imagined that the influence of the Spirit,—without which all preaching is useless—will accompany his ; and not being sent of God, “ he will not profit the people at all.”

CHAPTER III.

On the Cultivation of Ministerial Talents— Objects of Study.

IN the preceding chapter we have adverted to those qualifications moral and natural, which are essentially necessary for those to possess who engage in the solemn and arduous work of preaching the Gospel.

The *improvement* of these qualifications by those who have entered upon the work is proposed to be now considered. The leading object of this work is to demonstrate the practicability, and urge the importance of such improvement.

First of all, however, it may be expedient to lay down a sort of plan or method of study with regard to its objects, or in other words, to advert to those branches of knowledge and acquirement which are of the most essential importance to a preacher of the Gospel, and the acquisition of which is presumed to be compatible with the circumstances of those who have only the command of those intervals of time which the occupations of business usually allow.

It is to young lay preachers, who are not favoured with the advantages of education and experience that the following directions are humbly offered.—

To them we recommend, in the first place, the following very general one :—*Exercise unremitted application in the use of all available means in order to enlarge your stock of useful knowledge and especially to obtain clear and correct views of the system of Christian Theology.*

Knowledge is the ground work of pulpit talents. Eloquence without knowledge is a mere play thing. But the acquisition of a competent knowledge of revealed truth is not the work of a day, nor the prize of sloth : on the contrary, the most vigorous mind might be intensely employed throughout a long life in exploring this mighty field, without being able to complete the research.

The knowledge of young men is, in most cases, necessarily scanty ; and it would be happy if they were always aware of this : modesty is not only a most amiable trait in the character of a young minister, but it affords a very encouraging promise of future eminence. Unfortunately, inexperience too often generates self-conceit : and hence this contemptible vice is too often manifested by young preachers. Vanity generally indicates a narrow capacity, and it is extremely adverse to the enlargement of the most expansive one. Whenever a young man is observed to evince any other disposition than that of ingenuous diffidence, and an ardent desire to learn of his superiors, a very low calculation may be formed relative to his future attainments. This sentiment is sanctioned by the wise king of Israel—“ Seest thou a man wise in his

own conceit, there is more hope of a fool than of him," and all experience verifies its correctness.

The most effectual way of obtaining scriptural knowledge, is by reading the Scriptures themselves ; no other reading can be a substitute for this ; they are the fountain of divine wisdom ; and however tempting may be its various streams, yet the water of life is always the most pure and refreshing at the source.

The profitable perusal of the Scriptures demands a suitable disposition of mind. This includes a firm belief in their inspiration, and the vital importance of the truths they reveal, together with an earnest desire to comprehend their import, and feel their efficacy : to this must be added a mind docile and humble, divested of prejudice and prepossession, and such a diffidence of our own powers as will lead us to seek the illumination of that Spirit, which alone can enable us to comprehend the full and saving meaning of divine truth. A mind thus distrustful of its own wisdom, and humbly seeking the wisdom that is from above, will be much more likely to arrive at the full, spiritual, and to the carnal often hidden meaning of the sacred volume than one who opens it with vain and unhallowed self-confidence. The latter is a disposition which God abhors, but "the meek he has promised to guide in judgment"—"As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word."

Much of the advantage of reading the Scriptures depends upon a judicious method of doing it. In general it is unwise to attempt to read a great deal

at a time. The memory performs the same functions in the intellectual, that the stomach does in the alimentary system ; both are of limited capacity, and the overloading of either will be productive of correspondent evils. A single chapter read with care and well digested by meditation, will be found to yield much more advantage than the hasty and superficial perusal of several.

One exception, however, must be made to this remark ; this refers to some of the historical parts of Scripture ; but particularly to the argumentative parts of the New Testament. These must occasionally be read *uninterruptedly*, in order to obtain clear and comprehensive views of the thread of the narrative or the scope and connexion of the argument. Such an unbroken perusal is especially necessary in reading the Epistles of Paul, most of which were written on a particular occasion, and have one general subject or design :* this circum-

* This remark will be illustrated by referring to the Epistles to the Romans and to the Hebrews. The occasion of writing the former may be collected from the Epistle itself. It appears that the Apostle had received information respecting the circumstances of the Christians at Rome by Aquila and Priscilla ; see Rom. xvi. 3. and by other Jews who had been expelled from Rome by a decree of Claudius mentioned Acts xviii. 2. from which he learnt that it was partly composed of Heathens converted to Christianity, and partly of Jews who had, with many remaining prejudices, believed in Jesus as the true Messiah ; he learnt also that many contentions arose from the claims of the Gentile converts to equal privileges with the Jews, and the unwillingness of the latter to admit those claims unless the Gentile converts were circumcised. To settle these differences appears to have been the leading object of Paul in writing his Epistle to them.

stance illustrates many things apparently obscure in his writings, and the knowledge and constant recollection of it is essential to their advantageous perusal. The profound and often extended arguments of the Apostle, are frequently interrupted by parenthesis, of which it is necessary to be aware ; this, with the divisions of chapters and verses, which are sometimes highly improper and unnatural, demands great care in the reader, and very strongly bespeaks the advantage of an occasionally uninterrupted reading. When small portions only are read at a time, and at considerable intervals, we pause perhaps and dismiss the subject, in those very places where continuous attention is indispensable ; and thus, though we may be edified by the sentiments abstractedly considered, yet the principal force of the passage, if not its meaning, will be unperceived, for want of knowing its connexion with the general subject. Like a stone detached from a building, we may admire its workmanship, but are ignorant of its use.

The principal object to be attained in searching the Scriptures is a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the system of divine truth, as it is therein

The Epistle to the Hebrews, while it is a lucid exposition of the Christian system, is at the same time, an admirable commentary on and key to the Mosaic ritual ; but it is impossible to perceive the force of the Apostle's reasoning, if read in detached pieces. An eminent critic has observed, that the proposition of the whole Epistle is this—*Jesus of Nazareth is the true God !* In arguing this point, he proves, first—that Christ is superior to Angels ; secondly—to Moses.

unfolded : another, and by no means an unimportant acquisition which should be sought after, is a familiarity with the language employed by the inspired writers in the statement of that truth. To accomplish this, the student should commit to memory those passages which corroborate and illustrate the different subjects he prepares for the pulpit. A few of the most striking passages in the chapters of his daily reading, should also be selected for the same purpose. This practice may be felt to be difficult and laborious at first, but perseverance therein, as it strengthens the memory and multiplies its stock, will gradually lighten the labour, and soon create a wonderful command of scriptural arguments and language. To have the memory well furnished with passages of Scripture, will be found to render valuable assistance in extempore speaking ; and in the composition of sermons will often save the trouble of turning over the leaves of a concordance.

The *general* reading of a local preacher, who perhaps can devote but a small portion of each day to the exercise, ought, on that very account, to be judiciously select. For such a person to spend considerable time in reading newspapers, reviews, controversies on hackneyed and unimportant topics, or any other work whose principal object is amusement, is a most imprudent and criminal misapplication of time. Such a practice is not only useless, but mischievous ; for it consumes the time which might be employed to better purpose ; it encumbers

the memory with worthless lumber, and thereby contracts its capacity for the reception of more valuable furniture; it generates a taste for light and frothy literature, and indisposes the mind for the earnest study of graver subjects. To be ignorant of the news of the day—if we except a few leading events of great and general importance—can scarcely be deemed discreditable to a Gospel Minister; and to a local preacher, who faithfully redeems his little leisure for better studies, it is a mark of wisdom rather than an indication of clownishness and bad taste. And small is the loss as well as the discredit arising from the neglect of our ephemeral literature. For, in so far as it is innocent, it is chiefly valuable for purposes of amusement. Some filaments of genius, we own, run through different portions of the floating mass; and now and then a valuable gem is borne on its bosom, or hid in its recesses; but through what seas of vanity must a reader wade in order to collect these scattered gems of thought! The memory may load itself with an aliment, which contains a very small portion of essential nutriment; and which, by its pernicious admixtures vitiates while it feeds.

Few local preachers are in circumstances to purchase a large quantity of books; nor is this so heavy a misfortune as some people imagine: a little reading with much thought and study is the most effectual method of improving the mind. A person who has access to an extensive library, with but little time for reading, will be in great danger,

especially if he have an unmanageable thirst for knowledge, of reading with superficial and unprofitable rapidity, and of neglecting to think for himself; and no extent of reading can be a substitute for meditation and study. To be furnished with the ideas of other men, is a very different thing from possessing ideas of our own. A young minister ought chiefly to confine his reading to approved theological works; and at his commencement, he should give those the preference that are directly calculated to elucidate the Scriptures, and to facilitate his investigation of their contents. Allusions are often made in the Bible to the geographical peculiarities of Palestine, and the other Eastern Countries in which the sacred writers lived, as well as to the manners and customs of their existing inhabitants. Many of the metaphors of the prophets and the parables of our Saviour, are borrowed from these local objects and obsolete scenes. The knowledge of these matters is therefore indispensable to an intelligible perusal of many parts of the Sacred Scriptures. A Theological Dictionary will perhaps furnish the biblical student with this information in the easiest and most compendious form; and if we might be allowed to recommend one, it would be that of Mr. Watson's recently published, which for the candour and ability with which the articles are written, and the compass of information which a happy condensation has enabled him to supply—will be a work of great value to young ministers, and especially to those who have little time for reading. This work with

Theological Institutes, by the same author—Horn's Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Sacred Writings—Paley's Works—An approved Commentary—Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, and first three Volumes of Sermons—would form no contemptible theological library of a young local preacher. These works carefully read and digested by meditation and prayer, would lay a solid foundation of useful knowledge in his mind. We would particularly recommend the reading of good sermons; not only for the sake of the expositions of Scriptures they afford, but because they may be models, not for his servile imitation, but from which he may collect the general principles of that species of composition.

The young divine should, as soon as possible, make himself master of the principal arguments for the authenticity of the Scriptures, and the divinity of the Saviour. It seems highly reasonable that every Christian believer should be acquainted with the grounds of his faith, as well for the sake of his own stability and satisfaction, as that he may be able to give a reason to them that ask him of the hope that is in him: and this is still more necessary in a public teacher of Christianity, who being "set for the defence of the Gospel," will often be required to confirm the faith of the wavering, and defend the truth against the cavils of gainsayers.

An *orderly and systematic* view of Divine Truth is highly desirable to a preacher: he should not

suffer his knowledge to exist in his mind in isolated confusion and disjointed fragments. The sacred truths of Revelation form a beautiful *whole*; a living temple of which Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone; *a body* of exquisite proportions among all the parts of which there is an harmonious connexion and a mutual dependence.

The salvation of the world through the meritorious mediation of the Son of God, and the sanctifying energy of the Holy Ghost, is the grand subject of the whole Bible; the great moral “day-star” which gives to all other truths their lustre and value. The history of the Jews, with the whole ritual of their lawgiver, and the writings of their prophets form the introduction to the glorious scheme of Redemption. To possess a regular and connected view of the plan of salvation; to know the exact relative situation and importance of its various truths, must be a highly important attainment to the individual whose business it is to exhibit and recommend the truth to others.

A preacher of the Gospel should be well acquainted with human nature. One of the most frequent themes of his public ministrations will be *man* himself—man as a rational, moral, immortal, and fallen being—man as possessing various mental powers, animal appetites, and many passions and propensities which partake both of an animal and rational nature—man, as the subject of an incomparably deceitful and desperately wicked heart, as guilty, depraved, and ruined; obnoxious to an eternal punishment which he makes no effort to

shun ; a candidate for an endless and infinite bliss, which he stupidly disregards, and for which he is wholly unfit. Man, in all these respects, will from time to time be the subject of his discourses. How necessarily then that he should be profoundly acquainted with human nature ! Now, in addition to the information with which the Inspired Volume will furnish him, relative to the origin, the apostacy, the character, and the destination of man he may learn much on the subject from History and Biography. These, next to the Bible, are the principal sources whence his knowledge of human nature must be derived. Here he will behold human character displayed in all its diversified peculiarities and circumstances, and the motives and consequences of human conduct practically developed ; and History will deliver a gloomy and uncompromising testimony to the reality and extent of human depravity. But it is not from books alone that the christian divine must obtain his knowledge of man, but from actual observation from a careful attention to the various characters who come under his notice. Above all, his own heart he must submit to the most searching and incessant scrutiny : for this is the shortest and surest road to the knowledge of man. Of other men he can only judge by their actions ; their motives, sometimes inaccessible, will often be matter of doubtful conjecture. But while he cannot penetrate the hearts of others, he can explore the deepest recesses of his own. Here he can inspect the foundations of vice and virtue, and trace his actions to their primary

and most latent springs : and the general principles of human nature being alike in all mankind, the man who has an accurate knowledge of himself, will, on that account, be enabled with surprising sagacity and success, to detect and analyze the hearts of others. Under the searching discourses of such persons, many a sinner has been astonished to find the most inscrutable workings of his soul revealed, and perhaps in the first paroxysms of amazement imagined the preacher was possessed of some supernatural discernment ; but the peneration which an ignorant person might think miraculous, has chiefly resulted from self-examination.

To *moral* History must be added *natural*. The former by describing the actions and developing the character of man, shew us what is man ; the latter, in the account which it gives us of the structure and economy of his physical frame, as well as the faculties and habits of the various tribes of animals, displays the being, wisdom, power, and goodness of the great Creator. The natural history of plants and animals may be termed natural Theology. From this ample and interesting volume, the Christian preacher may obtain many powerful arguments and bright illustrations to establish and display the various subjects of his ministry. Howe's *Living Temple*, and Paley's *Natural Theology*, are works that should be in the hands of every young local preacher. They contain not only valuable information on all the most striking facts of natural history ; but their chief merit, as well as their principal design, is the ap-

plication of these facts to the grand purpose of demonstrating the existence and attributes of the Supreme Being. From these and similar works we learn the great object which every reader of Natural History should constantly have in view, and the preacher is taught in what manner it may be made subservient to his public instructions.

A theological education must also include a knowledge of Ecclesiastical History. A public teacher of Christianity ought certainly to be acquainted with its progress through successive ages and amongst different nations; its various declensions and revivals; the corruptions and heresies which have from time to time disfigured it; the schisms, difficulties, and persecutions with which it has had to struggle. Church History is especially edifying in its notices of eminent Christians, and the records it gives of the power of divine grace in the triumphant sufferings of Martyrs. In all these particulars, besides the interest of its general facts, it is valuable, and may be strongly recommended to the attention of local preachers.

A knowledge of the principles of Logic should be sought by every young minister. "Logic," says Mr. Wesley, "is the art of good sense." Dr. Watts defines it "the art of using reason well in our inquiries after truth, and the communication of it to others." These definitions shew it to be a very useful and important art. Important it must be to facilitate our efforts in the improvement of our own minds, and doubly so to the individual who is employed in imparting the fruits of his studies to others.

Logic, though in some sense a distinct science, is with more propriety regarded as a handmaid to all the other. Its object is, not so much to put us in possession of any particular class of truths, as to discipline our faculties, and to teach us their proper exercise in the attainment of knowledge. It is of similar importance to the mind in its intellectual victories, as the discipline and orderly arrangement of an army are to successful warfare. The great business of Logic is to guide us to the discovery of truth—truth in our ideas, in our judgments, in our reasonings, and to a true and successful method of conveying our knowledge and convictions to others. Logic instructs us how to avoid receiving false ideas or impressions; discovers the various impositions that are practiced upon the human mind, and teaches us the proper classification and arrangement of our just ideas. It also unfolds the correct principles of judging; guards the understanding against being mislead and perverted by prejudice; it assists us to pursue an investigation without darkness and embarrassment, to reason justly, clearly and forcibly, and not only to avoid using fallacious arguments ourselves, but to detect the sophisms of others.

Mr. Wesley recommends Logic in very strong terms; and he was himself celebrated for his skill in the art; and indeed of this all his writings bear indubitable marks. No writer was ever more completely master of the difficult arts of abridgment and condensation. To extract all that was valuable in a work from the useless verbiage and expletive

ideas with which it was encumbered, was apparently to him a very easy task ; and no writer could more happily unite brevity with strength and clearness than he has done. This valuable talent was mainly attributable to his logical skill.

The study of Logic we recommended to lay preachers for this special reason, it is adapted to their limited opportunities of study. The knowledge of Mathematics might perhaps answer the same purpose of disciplining the faculties ; but Mathematics, Chemistry, Languages, and many other sciences, are too large in their compass to be hopefully attempted by the generality of local preachers — But none of them need be ignorant of Logic who can devote a few minutes in the day to its attainment.

For the same reason, as well as on account of its indispensable importance to a public speaker, the study of Grammar and the arts of composition and correct speaking recommends itself to preachers in a local capacity. Logic assists us to frame correct ideas, and arrive at just conclusions ; Grammar teaches us to express our ideas in accurate and suitable language. A good Grammar and Dictionary — together with a work like Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric — or we would say, Blair's Lectures themselves, should be in the hands of every local preacher. By the first he would be taught the elements of the language ; particularly the different parts of speech of which language is composed, with their respective functions ; and also the agreement and construction of words in a sentence. By the second — he would be taught the precise mean-

ing and correct pronunciation of words. The last would introduce him to an acquaintance with the higher branches of composition ; including the laws of style and figure, and the principles of graceful and persuasive delivery, with a variety of other matters important to be known by a public speaker. Not that we imagine that rhetorical rules, however just, are sufficient to form an orator. “Supposing natural genius,” says Dr. Blair, “to be favourable, more by a great deal depends upon private application and study than upon any system of instruction that is capable of being publicly communicated. But at the same time, though rules and instructions cannot do all that is requisite, they may do much that is of great use. They cannot, it is true, inspire genius ; but they can direct and assist it. They cannot remedy barrenness ; but they may correct redundancy. They point out proper models for imitation. They bring into view the chief beauties that ought to be studied, and the principal faults that ought to be avoided, and thereby tend to enlighten taste, and lead genius from unnatural deviations into its proper channel. What would not avail for the production of great excellencies, may, at least, serve to prevent the commission of considerable errors.”

A speaker who has not a competent and grammatical acquaintance with language, cannot do justice to his own conceptions. He may have strong sense, and be able to conceive vigorous thoughts ; but he will often be unable to express them otherwise than very indistinctly, and some-

times not even at all. This inconvenience will be particularly felt at the moment of extemporary delivery. Striking thoughts are often presented to the mind of a public speaker during the delivery of his discourse, if he is skilled in language, he will be enabled immediately to seize and embody them;—but if otherwise, they will elude his grasp, and perhaps he will expose himself to contempt by his ineffectual endeavours to lay hold of them. The beauty of many a fine sentiment is spoiled or concealed by the despicable language in which it is clothed; and the force of powerful arguments is often unfelt by the use of feeble or improper terms.

A skilful command of words greatly facilitates the operations of thought. Words often conduct us as by a clue to the knowledge of things which would otherwise have remained concealed. Ideas sometimes exist in the mind in an indistinct form; they seem to float before us in a sort of mist; in such cases words often assist us to lay hold of them, and drag them into clearer light. For—to quote again the last-mentioned Author—“true rhetoric and sound logic are very nearly allied. The study of arranging and expressing our thoughts with propriety, teaches us to think as well as to speak with propriety. By putting our sentiments into words, we always conceive them more distinctly.”

Ignorance of grammar is disgraceful and unpardonable in a public speaker. It is *disgraceful* to hear good ideas spouted out in blundering and beggarly language; it is *unpardonable*, because even no local preacher need be destitute of this

attainment, if he have common sense, and a disposition to redeem his time. We will venture to affirm, that a man who has not leisure or capacity sufficient to enable him to learn to speak his own language correctly, ought not to believe himself called to be a public preacher of the Gospel.

Language is the dress of ideas : and as neat and elegant attire exhibits the person to advantage, so it is scarcely possible to conceive to how much more advantage ideas appear, when clothed in words happily selected, correctly pronounced, and gracefully delivered, than when they are disfigured by mean language, and spouted out with a bungling accent.

It may be said that the beauty of correct language is not perceived by the uneducated ; that they can understand a person who addresses them in their own dialect, better than one who speaks with classical accuracy. This remark can scarcely be admitted. It is believed that few people are so ignorant as not to understand a sentence grammatically worded *quite as well* as if worded incorrectly.— Besides, all are not thus ignorant. There are usually some in every congregation who can relish good speaking ; and these can hardly escape being disgusted and prejudiced by hearing a blundering preacher ; and the disgust and prejudice thus created, will perhaps prevent them from hearing with profit.

CHAPTER IV.

The Mental Discipline, necessary to successful Study.

EFFICIENTLY and faithfully to preach the Gospel, is a most solemn, arduous, and difficult work ;—amply sufficient to task the energies of the most powerful and cultivated mind, and to occupy the undivided attention, without the interruption of any other business. It is evident therefore that an efficient preacher cannot be an ordinary character ; a man of feeble intellect, limited knowledge, or indolent habits. And it is equally evident that in the performance of pulpit duties the lay preacher will have to struggle with peculiar disadvantages.

For besides commencing, as is chiefly the case, with a defective education, and scanty stores of knowledge, his literary facilities are often few, and yet perhaps more than he has leisure to avail himself of. Anxious attention to business consumes the greatest part of his time ; and the fatigue or irritation it occasions often prevents him from making an advantageous use of the remainder. The bustle and harass of business are highly unfriendly to that collected and spiritual state of mind which is indispensable to so grave a study as that of divinity. Occupied in wasting labour, and coming

often in rugged contact with ignorance and vulgarity, the mind insensibly contracts a kind of numbness and unliability for refined and intellectual pursuits. Thus when the lay preacher retires from business to study, he usually finds himself like an instrument out of tune : the tone of his mind is injured. His thoughts scattered, he must collect, grovelling, he must exalt, and unsettled, he must fix. Instead of that concentration of thought and continuity of effort which are regarded as essential to great achievements, his meditations are broken and interrupted : scraps of time and fragments of thought are all that he commands.

These, it must be acknowledged, are formidable difficulties, but they are not insurmountable ; nevertheless they cannot be surmounted without the exercise of self-denying prudence and patient industry. Hopeless is the character of that local preacher who thinks lightly of his work : who imagines that the composition of a sermon now and then is a trifling matter, and does not require him to submit to rigid rule and severe application. The number of such characters is unhappily too considerable. We regard them with mingled emotions of contempt and pity : we despise their egregious absurdity, and tremble at their criminal remissness. Let not such slothful and unfaithful evangelists imagine, that the Great Head of the Church will honour them as the instruments of saving souls, or that they will ever be a credit to their high vocation !

Others, we have no doubt, err in the opposite

extreme : from a depressing view of the magnitude of the work, and of their own insufficiency for its performance, they are tempted to sit down in despairing inactivity, and neglect to use the means they possess. To such persons who may be regarded as far more hopeful characters than the last mentioned—we principally address ourselves. We hope to convince them that they have no need to despair ; that they have resources which, if judiciously economized, will raise them superior to their difficulties, and enable them to advance with a steady and improving pace. We remind them that a narrow capital, cleverly managed, has often been the embryo of an immense fortune ; let them not therefore pore over their straitened circumstances in impotent despondency, but calmly endeavour to ascertain their most prudent line of conduct, and then vigorously and patiently follow the plan they have marked out. If their external resources are few and barren, let that circumstance rouse the energies of their minds to greater exertion. Under any circumstances, the most essential and effective resources are in the mind itself. Industry, patient, prudent, and persevering, has accomplished the most extraordinary achievements.

In the improvement of ministerial talents, the three following things are demanded : a steady conviction of the importance of the ministerial work ;—prudence in the selection of studies, and in the distribution and occupation of the time ;—vigilance in the government of the thoughts. To those who are just engaging in the sacred work,

and are placed in the ordinary circumstances with respect to education and opportunities in which local preachers are usually found, we offer the following hints on the important subject of self-improvement with reference to preaching.

First of all—*labour to acquire lively and impressive views of the responsibility and importance of the work in which you are engaged.*

We commence with this remark, because such a conviction must form one of the main pillars by which the zeal and efforts of a christian minister are sustained, and to a lay preacher who has no stimulus from the prospect of wealth, and but little from that of fame, it must possess additional importance.

Recollect, then, that no office is so dignified as that of a minister of the Cross: none so deeply affects the well-being of mankind: none aims at the attainment of objects so truly magnificent: the grand objects of preaching the Gospel are to save souls; to enlighten the ignorant, reclaim the erring, alarm the careless, “to comfort all that mourn,” and to instruct and edify believers. It is, in other words, to snatch brands from the eternal fire, to rescue the prey from the mighty, to banish vice and misery, to diffuse holiness and peace, and under the Great Captain of their salvation, “to bring many souls to glory.” And to sum up the objects and design of his ministry in the language of inspiration, they are, “to open the eyes of the Gentiles, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, that they may

receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among all them that are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus."

Now if any thing can awaken the ambition, or rouse the energies of the human mind, surely it is the prospect of achieving these infinitely mighty and beneficent purposes. Who can estimate the value of a soul?—None but he who can estimate its powers, and their illimitable improveability. Who can measure its duration and its capacity for happiness or misery? none but he who can adequately conceive what is implied in the eternal damnation or the eternal salvation of a soul. None, in a word, can calculate the value of a soul, but he who shed his blood to redeem it from sin and hell.—How dignified then is that enterprize which aims to save a soul! How incomparable the honour of being instrumental in so godlike a work! "He that winneth souls is wise." "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him. Let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." With such views of the magnitude of your work clearly and steadily maintained, it will be impossible for you to pursue it in a heartless, slothful manner. They will, on the contrary, prepare you to submit to any privation or hardship, in order to obtain "the prize of your high calling." Remember your solemn responsibility.—The Gospel trumpet is put into your hand;

and woe be to you if you give not the people faithful warning—their blood will be required at your hand. Recollect your vast reward, if you are found faithful. Every soul you are instrumental in saving will be a gem in your crown of glory. If only *one* soul should be savingly benefited by your ministry, it will amply compensate and justify all your self-denial and exertion.

We remind you also, that the conviction of the responsibility of your office will only be influential in proportion as your mind is imbued with the spirit of the Gospel, and expanded with the love of Christ. Labour, therefore, to drink deep into the spirit of love ; it is the grand spring of the activity and efforts of a Christian minister. If “ the love of Christ constrain you,” you will not repine that you are obliged to study while others are enjoying recreation and rest—that to you the Sabbath is a day of labour, and sometimes the severest labour of the seven—and that for your labour you receive no sordid remuneration, and rarely even expressions of gratitude from those for whose benefit you expend it : but in the contemplation of the sacrifices and trials connected with your Sabbath employment, you will be able to say with the Great Apostle, “ none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

Second—*Exercise prudence in the selection of books and studies.*—This is a point of vital impor-

tance ; for the most strenuous efforts, if misdirected, will be of little value. If you acquire a habit of reading and studying at random, as humour or circumstances may happen to invite, and disregard the suggestions of your better judgment, you will study to very small purpose : the results of such fitful efforts will be insignificant enough. Knowledge is valuable only as it is practically useful. This principle is always professed to be kept in view in the éducation of children, which is usually conducted with a special view to the profession or business in which they are intended to be placed. Now, to be a wise and useful preacher of the Gospel, should be your grand object ; and, therefore, every qualification you should value and seek only as it contributes to this end. Divinity must engage your principal attention, and such other branches of knowledge as have an immediate bearing on that most sublime of sciences. It is indeed very desirable for a preacher to be acquainted with Mathematics, Languages, Astronomy, &c. ; nor ought we to be suspected of any design to depreciate the knowledge of these sciences. But every preacher should seriously ask himself this question :—Can I pursue any one of these branches of learning without neglecting those studies that are essential to my usefulness as a minister of the Gospel ? If he cannot return a satisfactory affirmative to this question, he will not hesitate to prefer the real honour of practical usefulness, to the tinsel reputation of speculative learning. We do not now speak of a *general* acquaintance with these and many other

subjects which may be obtained without a very considerable sacrifice of time and attention, and which every preacher should aspire to possess. Nor is it forgotten, that there may be cases in which previous attainments, and favouring circumstances, may justify a local preacher in attempting those higher orders of scholarship. We are fully aware of the impossibility of proposing a plan of study which will suit every one of a class of men so variously gifted and situated as are local preachers. The method must, in some measure, vary with circumstances; but whether the range of your studies be contracted to suit scanty leisure and facilities, or more comprehensive as it ought to be if your circumstances are more propitious, still your grand business must ever be kept in view; all the rays of knowledge you collect must converge to one point, the improvement of your preaching talent.

All the greatest masters in any science or art, are those who have concentrated their energies in one point; and for this a very obvious reason may be assigned; the human mind is limited in its powers, and in proportion to the multiplicity of its pursuits will be the slowness of its progress in any one direction. Mind, as well as matter, is weakened by division. Certain rare cases, indeed, where extraordinary genius and abundant opportunities meet, may be admitted to be in some sort exceptions; but, in general, the most useful and eminent characters are those who bend the whole force of their minds towards one particular profession or pursuit.

Now, if the importance and difficulty of ministerial duties require you to abstain from the profound study of many sciences in themselves highly valuable ; it will scarcely be necessary to say, that the same reason will still more imperiously require you to discard every pursuit that is frivolous and unprofitable. It will be necessary for you to keep under due restraint the passion for novelty. Despise that itching curiosity which would lead you incessantly in quest after "some new thing," and which is utterly subversive of solid improvement.

Third—*Carefully attend to the distribution and improvement of your leisure.*—Not only let it be employed, but methodized. Divide it into portions, and to each allot its separate occupations. Order in the distribution of time is the very soul of dispatch. When every hour knows its work, and no work is postponed beyond its hour ; business proceeds with a tranquil, steady, and vigorous pace. But he who acts upon no plan ; who reads or studies just what happens to come to hand, or to chime with his present humour will be always confused, always miserable, and, for any advantage that will result from such desultory efforts, he might almost as well be always idle.

How to find time for the literary pursuits we have recommended, may appear to most local preachers, a problem of no easy solution. "It is usual," says Dr. Johnson, "for those who are advised to look forward to the attainment of any new

qualification, to look upon themselves as required to change the general course of their conduct ; to dismiss business and exclude pleasure, and to devote their days and nights to a particular attention. But all common degrees of excellence are attainable at a lower price : he that should steadily and resolutely assign to any science or language those interstitial vacancies which occur in the most crowded variety of diversion or employment, would find every day new irradiations of knowledge, and discover how much more is to be hoped for from frequency and perseverance than from violent efforts and sudden desires ; efforts which are soon remitted when they encounter difficulty, and desires, which if they are indulged too often, will shake off the authority of reason and range capriciously from one subject to another." We will venture to assert, that the greatest number of local preachers have a sufficiency of time for all the purposes required by their sacred vocation, providing they will suffer no part of their leisure to be uselessly expended. It is said of a distinguished character, that he found time for his multifarious avocations by *never losing it*. And we are anxious to teach local preachers, not how they may secure more leisure than they have, but how they may make the most advantageous use of that which they do possess.

For this purpose, we will undertake to propose a plan which will, at least, serve to exemplify the preceding general remarks, and to demonstrate

how much may be done by the diligent improvement of small means and little time.

We will suppose, then, that upon an average, you have four hours in the day at your command ; and this cannot be thought an extravagant supposition, for though a few have not perhaps so many, numbers have more, or might have more, if they would allow no time to be wasted in frivolous pursuits, or unnecessary sleep. Proceeding then upon this supposition—let one hour be employed in reading the Scriptures and private prayer ; another in the composition of sermons ; one in theological reading, and the rest in such literary studies and and general reading as are most adapted to improve your preaching talents. On this arrangement you may every day acquire various and substantial improvement ; and though it will, of course, suffer occasional interruptions, they will seldom be of long continuance, and often be compensated by occasional extra advantages.

Probably the individual whose uninterrupted studies are prosecuted under all the splendid advantages that literary facilities and learned society can bestow, may be disposed to smile at this minute economy, as paltry in itself, and inefficient in its results ; but, for the same reason, he might ridicule the small economy by which a thrifty cottager endeavours to make his scanty wages yield him the necessaries of life. Every one knows how much scope there is for prudence even in the expenditure of a labourer, and how much the exercise of that prudence contributes to his comfort. But the poor

in the literary world have equal need of economy in the expenditure of their time and means of improvement; and will find such economy equally fraught with advantages. Very limited as the proposed course of study may seem to be, it will by no means be insignificant in results. What these results will be, may be calculated with numerical precision. First, then, three chapters in the Bible may be deliberately read every day, besides some important passages committed to memory. A sermon may be thoroughly studied and carefully written in three or four weeks;* and few local preachers

* It may be thought injudicious to recommend writing sermons at full length to persons whose time is so limited. The practice however has not been recommended without a deliberate and strong conviction of its decided utility—a conviction which experience, reason, and authority, have united to produce. The consumption of time it occasions is not so great as might be supposed; three or four hours being quite sufficient to write all that is needful to be written of a sermon; and three or four hours in a month cannot be deemed a very burdensome tax on the time. To young preachers especially the practice will be found to be highly valuable. It is, in the first place, the most effectual way to improve the style both in regard to correctness and variety. Sameness in the use of words and phrases, and inaccuracies in combining them into sentences, are faults very apt to be overlooked in the haste and warmth of delivery, but which every one strives to avoid in writing; and they are then avoided with less difficulty: improprieties are more obvious when we are writing, because perceived by the eye as well as the ear, and we are then more at leisure to attend to the niceties of composition. It is also not undeserving of regard, that the practice of writing sermons, improves the penmanship and spelling, neither of which are mean accomplishments. Another consideration in favour of the practice in question is, that when a sermon is written it is preserved, and may at any future period be recalled with ease to the memory; but if unwritten, it is speedily forgotten and lost.

have occasion for more, or even so many. The hours devoted to theological reading will enable you to get through a moderately sized octavo in two or three weeks; and in the other hour you might make important additions to your stock of general literature.

Advancing at this rate, your progress though not swift or splendid, will not be inconsiderable. In one year, for instance, you will have read the Bible completely over, and have stored your memory with select passages. You will have written, at least, twelve sermons, and read upwards of thirty volumes, on various subjects. And supposing you had commenced with the first principles of scholarship, you will have made yourself master of the first rudiments of arithmetic, grammar, logic, &c. And further, if you hold in this course for seven years, you will have read the Bible seven times over, will have written upwards of eighty sermons, and have read more than two hundred volumes; you will have become expert in grammar, arithmetic, logic, and various other branches of useful knowledge; and if you have properly attended to the composition and delivery of your sermons, you will not need to be afraid to address the most intelligent congregation in the kingdom.

To those who may be disposed to question the accuracy of these conclusions, we would suggest another consideration:—four hours is an inconsiderable portion of time in itself; but when multiplied by three hundred and sixty-five, they amount to one thousand four hundred and sixty; and to

reckon eight hours an ordinary working-day, they make *one hundred and eighty-two days and a-half of eight hours each in the year.**

We are aware of the manifold interruptions to which a man of business will be liable in the prosecution of this plan, to which however we are not disposed to attach much importance: for if business encroach upon his accustomed leisure one day, it perhaps restores it to him the next. If his hours of retirement are now and then invaded, the loss is retrieved by occasional opportunities of improving conversation, and of hearing able preachers, &c. And it must not be forgotten that many of the manual occupations of business are attended with little anxiety, and dispense in a great measure with the exercise of thought, and thus the mind is at liberty to pursue its meditations, while the hands are engaged in labour.

Those who are placed in the obscure and servile departments of active life, ought not to overlook their peculiar advantages. They may be disposed to complain, that their occupations fatigue their bodies and consume their time; but they may be reminded, that a larger and more responsible sphere

* The proverbial oracles of our parsimonious ancestors have informed us, that the fatal waste of fortune, is by small expenses; by the profusion of sums too little singly to alarm our caution, and which we never suffer ourselves to consider together. Of the same kind is the prodigality of life; he that hopes to look back hereafter upon past years, must learn to know the present value of single minutes, and endeavour to let no particle of time fall useless to the ground.—*Dr. Johnson.*

of action, if it left the body at ease, would oppress the mind itself, by the cares which would unavoidably attend it ;—cares to which they are now happily strangers. A servant may suppose, that if he were placed in the situation of his master, he should enjoy far superior advantages for study ;—whereas it is probable, that if such a change in his circumstances were to take place, he would find himself less capable of study than before. More time he might indeed have at his command, but the anxieties resulting from extensive interests, or serious responsibility, would often disable him for improving it in the manner he could wish.

But the want of books, or of money to procure them, is a misfortune that generally accompanies the want of time ; and by some it may be regarded as equally adverse to mental improvement. This difficulty, where it exists, cannot be denied to be formidable ;—but, formidable as it is, we may venture to affirm, that it will be rarely insurmountable to an ardent and aspiring genius. Thousands have surmounted it under the most untoward circumstances. He who is deeply impressed with the value of learning, will deny himself of many temporary conveniences in order to purchase books. And what he cannot buy, he will generally be enabled to *borrow*. That neighbourhood might justly be stigmatized as unintelligent or ungenerous in which no individuals could be found, who would not gladly, if they could, assist a poor aspirant after literature by the loan of a few books.

But the privation itself is not without its advan-

tages ; it has often been known to quicken desire, and rouse the energies of the mind into more vigorous play ;—to lead men to try the utmost strength of their understandings, and induce habits of profound and patient thinking—qualities in which those are often deficient who have abundance of outward helps.

And if a person can afford to purchase but few books, he will for that reason be more cautious in his selection, and be enabled to read the few he has in a more deliberate and effectual manner : and all must allow that a select and limited course of reading, with much meditation and prayer, will answer a far better purpose, than the hasty perusal of great numbers of irrelevant publications.*

Fourth—in order to realize the full advantage of your time and opportunities, endeavour to acquire *the government of your thoughts, or the power of transferring them, with facility, from one subject to another.*

This control of the thoughts is an essential part

* Those who reside in large towns, or their vicinity, will rarely, however poor, experience much of the difficulty in question. Books in such places are easily attainable in various ways, but particularly by means of public libraries. The case of those who live in remote country places, must, in general, be very different : but even in such places, local preachers possess a remedy for the evil namely, by the establishment of Theological Subscription Libraries among themselves. If such institutions were generally established in country Circuits, they would prove eminently useful to the body of local preachers, by giving numbers an opportunity of reading a variety of invaluable but too expensive Works for their individual means of purchasing.

of self-government, and is indispensable in any system of self-improvement; but to persons in the situation of lay preachers, it is peculiarly important. The bustle of worldly business, and the quiet and solemn exercise of theological study, are so diverse in their nature, and in the tone of mind they require and naturally produce, that it is impossible for the same person successfully to prosecute both without great self-command. 'The hours of your study being necessarily short, detached, and interrupted, —if you cannot readily stay the current of thought, and detach your mind at short notice from present objects, one half of your leisure will be wasted in unavailing struggles. This power is not easily attainable. Every one has felt the difficulty of suddenly dismissing any subject from the mind, which has for some time deeply occupied and interested it. And none feel the inconvenience of this difficulty more than local preachers; it will form the greatest trial of your judgment and patience. The ideas which have occupied your minds through the day, often refuse to depart at your bidding; they follow you into retirement; they solicit your attention, and embarrass your meditations.

'The mischief arising from this quarter will, of course, depend materially on the nature of the business in which you are engaged. If it be one that demands careful and unremitted attention, its hostility to study will be formidable: it will do more than merely entangle thought; it will add weariness to discomposure: and the mind which is at once fatigued by close application to business, and

haunted by the lingering images of the objects with which it has been conversant through the day, is little fitted for so grave a study as that of divinity. Now to persons in these circumstances, the mental discipline that has been recommended, must be in the highest degree necessary. For though it may not entirely cure the indisposition to study, which attention to ordinary business is apt to create, it will lessen and counteract it. Indeed, this indisposition, which is usually charged upon business, often arises in a great part from a slothful and undisciplined state of mind, and so far as it does so, it is curable like all other moral disorders.

Habit is known to possess the power, not only of making that which is difficult practicable, and that which is disgusting tolerable ; but even of making the former easy, and the latter pleasant. Such it is believed, would be its influence on the difficulty attending the alternation of business and study. Persevering practice would not only deprive it of its power of resistance, but even give to it the power of a stimulus to application. "He" says the author last quoted, "that will not suffer himself to be discouraged by fancied impossibilities may sometimes find his abilities invigorated by the necessity of exerting them in short intervals ; as the force of a current is increased by the contraction of its channel. When the mind is detained by unpleasing occupations, it returns again to study with greater alacrity than when it is glutted with ideal pleasure and surfeited with intemperance of application."

In order to the attainment of the self command we are anxious to recommend, attend to the following suggestions.

First—*Let your personal piety be vigorous and improving.* Guard and cherish the holy flame with unremitted diligence. This will supply you with a powerful and unvarying stimulus to activity ; it will moderate the excitement of earthly joys and griefs ; it will diffuse through the soul that serene and equitable pleasure which greatly facilitates mental application : ardent piety not only removes distaste for study, but renders it agreeable and savoury : for when the soul is expanded by divine love, no duty can be felt to be irksome.

Second—*Invariably commence your studies with earnest prayer.* Pray for a calm, recollected and patient mind ; for the “ spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind,” for deliverance from the invasion of earthly cares, and the insurrection of depraved passions. “ For to man that is good in his sight, God giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.” “ If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” Imperceptible it may be, yet real and powerful is the assistance which the Holy Spirit can impart to the mind in its pursuit of knowledge. His purifying, quickening, and enlightening, influences will, above all things else, facilitate study. Every pious minister could testify, that prayer is the best preparative for successful meditation. It allays the ferment of unhallowed passions : it imparts seriousness, honesty and vigour to the mind : it

compels the world, and the god of the world to withdraw.

Third—*Beware of an excessive love of the world* ; for this will give worldly thoughts easier access to the mind, and render their dismissal a matter of extreme difficulty ; it will generate anxiety, and where there is anxiety there is confusion and every evil work. A mind which is under the influence of carking care, or incumbered with worldly thoughts, is utterly unfit for so difficult a work as the study of divinity. Strive to attain a manly and christian superiority over the world ; a happy independance on earthly happiness ; you will then be blessed with the delightful repose of contentment in whatsoever state you may be placed. If your providential lot be straitened and barren, remember who has said, “ Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee.” “ Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.” Commit, then, your concerns into his hands ; and he who promised his ancient people, that no man should desire their lands, when they went to appear before the Lord at Jerusalem, will take care of your affairs while you are doing his work. A faithful preacher of the Gospel is peculiarly the object of Divine care in this respect ; and as those whom we now especially address, receive no temporal reward from man, it is not unreasonable for them to believe that God himself will reward them ; or, at least suffer them to be no losers by their disinterested labours.

Fourth—*Expend no more attention on temporal business than is necessary.* Far be it from us

to encourage a thoughtless improvidence in secular affairs. It is certain that no department of business, however simple, can be conducted without thought and attention. Nevertheless, beyond a certain point, prudence terminates in useless care; it is therefore a mark of great wisdom to know how far to proceed, and when to stop. But this wisdom must come from above, and it is rarely to be met with. The majority of mankind are not satisfied with making needful arrangements and calculations, they must indulge in unprofitable and visionary speculations. On a matter that might be dispatched in half an hour, they will spend perhaps half a day. Now it is these useless thoughts that we would abolish; not merely because they are useless, but because they absorb the time which might be turned to a better account.

Fifth—*When engaged in reading or studying, labour to fix your undivided attention on your subject*; to this end, obstinately resist the intrusion of irrelevant ideas. The thoughts are more under our control than is commonly supposed. It is acknowledged that they are suggested and introduced by such an immense diversity of means, often unforeseen, that no man can so effectually guard all the avenues as to secure himself entirely from intruders, yet something may be done: unwelcome ideas may often be kept at a distance by avoiding the objects or images that would recall them; and if they sometimes find admission in despite of all our vigilance, there are ways and means to repel them, and hasten their departure. When a person subjects his mind

to this rigid discipline for some time, the control of the thoughts becomes habitual and comparatively easy. Versatile and intractable as they are, they may, by the force of habit, be brought to submit to rule and order; and unspeakable is the advantage of such a conquest.

Sixth and lastly—*With whatever solicitude you redeem your hours and moments of leisure for literary purposes, beware that your studies never encroach on the time that is due to business.*—This caution is of peculiar importance to those who are in the capacity of servants. A vehement thirst for learning will subject a person to the constant temptation of infringing this rule. But the knowledge which is gained by this means, will not compensate for the sacrifice of prudence and morality it will occasion. Great as is the worth of mental cultivation, yet greater still—especially to a preacher, is an unimpeachable character. Besides, this sort of irregularity will tend to impair the habit of self-control, so deeply important to a lay preacher, and which it is our principal object at present to enjoin.

When business calls, cheerfully suspend your studies and endeavour to perform your secular duties with vigour and alacrity. Learn to submit without fretfulness to the occasional interruptions to which you will be liable. Your plans will sometimes be deranged, and your intentions thwarted; but even these occurrences need not be wholly unprofitable. If they retard your advancement in knowledge, they may accelerate your progress in

holiness, by exercising and improving your patience and self-denial.

To some persons, it is probable, the views expressed in this chapter, may present an uncomfortable and dissocializing aspect. Such a systematic and laborious devotion to study as they recommend may appear to be oppressive and inconsistent with the ordinary enjoyments of life. Trenching, as it must do so deeply on the attention and leisure, it may be thought incompatible with the discharge of many domestic duties, and unfriendly to the free and diffusive enjoyment of domestic society. These objections are certainly plausible; and they may even seem to be unanswerable to those who are total strangers to mental discipline.

With regard to the *severity* with which our system is charged, we grant that it will be too severe for the individuals who hate restraint; who have been accustomed to follow no guide but humour, who read just what happens to come to hand, or suit their fancy; and who, in fact, absolutely waste one half of their time, and reap little benefit from the remainder. It is also admitted that to persons engaged in very harrassing departments of business, the proposed plan will be burdensome, and in some cases impracticable. And indeed, on most it will be felt to press heavily at first until practice has made it habitual. But to a person enjoying ordinary advantages, and having fairly mastered the sloth and volatility of his mind, and who is also deeply impressed with the value of learning and the impor-

tance of the ministerial work, the close and methodical application recommended, will not only be tolerable but agreeable and delightful. The high satisfaction arising from the consideration of his being employed in so honourable and beneficent a work, will be itself a sufficient compensation for the labours and privations it imposes. And the alternation of business and study, although disagreeable at first, will become, by habit, really pleasurable and useful; each will be felt to be a relaxation to the other, and quite supersede all merely idle amusements.

But our scheme of self-improvement, it may be urged, if not uncomfortable, must be unsocial. Withdrawing the individual so much from the family circle, it must disable him for performing many important relative duties. We should be sorry to deny that a man's own family, and especially his children, have the first claim upon his attention, or that any considerations can justify the dereliction of the duties he owes to them, unless he can entrust them to the care of those on whom he can place entire confidence.

But diligence and circumspection will accomplish wonders; they will enable a man to contribute his full share to the happiness and improvement of his family, while at the same time he acts on an efficient plan of self-improvement. Such a person will find opportunities of ministering to domestic happiness, which others overlook. He will devote the hours of meals to improving conversation, he will frequently, in the course of his reading,

meet with something that he can profitably read aloud, and on which he can make instructive observations; and thus at once improve himself and others. Many incidental opportunities that are commonly thrown away, he will turn to good account, in nurturing the minds of his children, and edifying all. And, in fine, his intercourse with his family, though brief and interrupted, will be sufficient for every valuable purpose. His cultivated and vigorous mind enabling him to accomplish as much in half an hour, as many would not be able to do in half a day.

CHAPTER V.

The general Varieties in the secular Condition of Mankind considered in their comparative influence on Mental Improvement.

FACTS and experience attest that those scientific studies and attainments which are necessary for a preacher, are not only admissible with a life of business, but that there is scarcely any department of business, or any state of life, that is utterly incompatible with them. It is well known that by far the greater number of lay preachers are engaged in some active business ; and that they are to be found in every walk of life, and in every grade of society, from the chimney sweeper to the physician, and from the pauper to the esquire.

That some conditions of life, and some kinds of business, are more favourable to intellectual pursuits than others, is unquestionable ; nevertheless a careful survey and comparison of the disadvantages and facilities of each, will perhaps convince us, that the disparity is greater in appearance than in reality ; that the most untoward occupation or condition is not invincibly hostile to study, nor the most propitious wholly without peculiar disadvantages.

It will be proper to state at the outset of our

inquiry, that the acquisition of any kind of learning, besides natural capacity, demands two things :— external means or facilities ; and those moral qualities by which means are converted to practical advantage : by the former is meant leisure, books, instructors, &c. ; and by the latter, a love of learning, with patient and resolute industry in the pursuit of it.

Those civil distinctions that are created by affluence and poverty, may first be considered in their respective influence on literary studies. Our remarks will admit of an easy application to the case of local preachers, though a more general style will be adopted as more convenient.

Wealth can command leisure and retirement: it can procure books and instructors ; an exemption from the distressing anxieties of a dependant condition, and whatever else is needful in external aid ; so far, therefore, as external means are necessary and desirable, it is decidedly favourable to mental cultivation. But against these splendid advantages must be placed, the corrupting influence of wealth on those moral qualities and habits, on which all the value of outward helps depends. Riches strongly tend to cherish sloth, sensuality, and pride ; and no external difficulties oppose more effectual barriers to improvement than these vices.

He whose riches free him from the necessity of labour, rarely escapes contracting a moral incapacity for that exertion which is indispensable to high attainments in literature. Besides, the rich are not apt to feel the value of scientific pursuits as an

amusement like the poor ; they have other pleasures which they can obtain at an *easier*, if not a cheaper rate. “ Among the higher orders of society the very cheapness of literary pleasures has probably had the effect of making them to be less in fashion than others of which wealth can claim an exclusive enjoyment. Even such distinctions as eminence in intellectual pursuits can confer, must be shared with many of obscure birth and low station, and on that account alone has doubtless seemed often the less worthy of ambition to those who were already raised above the crowd by the accidents of fortune.”

To this may be added, that though wealth may obtain for the body an exemption from toil, it cannot secure the mind from the invasion of cares ; and if poverty have cares peculiar to itself, so also have riches : the latter may indeed be different and less tormenting, but they are often equally calculated to discompose the mind, and unfit it for study.

The unfriendly influence of wealth on close mental application, has too often been exemplified. It is observed by Dr. Johnson, (and every one may have verified the remark), “ that of those who have started their literary career with great and sudden refulgence, a great number have soon ceased to shine, and unexpectedly sunk into obscurity.” One reason of this may be, that the display of such precocious talents have procured for them admiration and perhaps wealth before their moral and intellectual habits were fixed ; and, by vitiating the former, left the latter unsupported.

Among the philosophers of the ancient world,

some are said to have spontaneously disencumbered themselves of their inheritances ; that the cares of managing their property might not interrupt their philosophical pursuits. Crates, Democritus, and Anaxagoras, are particularly mentioned as having made this sacrifice.

The late illustrious Lagrange used to say, that he certainly should never have been the mathematician he had turned out, if he had been born to a fortune instead of having to make his way to one.

It is said of the painter, Joseph Ribera, that after having for some time pursued his art at Rome in great indigence, he was patronized by one of the Cardinals, who, giving him apartments in his palace, enabled him to live at his ease ; but that after a while, finding himself growing indolent amidst his new comforts and luxuries, he actually withdrew himself from their corrupting influence, and voluntarily returned to poverty and labour. A similar anecdote is recorded of James Barry, another painter of modern times, and not less celebrated :—becoming suddenly popular by some of his performances, he was introduced into gay society, and into the usual follies of prosperous gaiety. But perceiving that his new course of life interrupted his studies, he became alarmed, and determined to withdraw himself from it before it should become a habit. These feelings came over him with so much force one night, when returning from a tavern, that he actually threw what money he had into the river, cursing it as having betrayed him into the excesses of which he had been guilty,

and from that day returned to his books and his easel.

Poverty, at first view, presents an aspect of uncompromising hostility to intellectual pursuits ;—it seems like a barren region and an ungenial climate, in which intellect whatever may be its native vigour, must be stunted in its growth, and withered in its bud. The necessity of labour, and the consequent consumption of time, which a dependant condition imposes, is one of the greatest obstructions to learning that arises out of indigence. Nor is want of time the only difficulty with which the poor student has to grapple ; for to him also the books and instructors are usually inaccessible, by which he would be enabled profitably to employ the time he has.

To his other privations also must be added, the want of early education. The opulent classes usually give their children a good education, by means of which the rudiments of useful learning, at least, are grafted in their minds ; and though these germs, in most cases, never arrive at perfection for want of subsequent culture, yet such of them as are afterwards disposed to turn their attention to scientific subjects, cannot fail to reap the greatest benefit from their early culture. But the early education of the lower orders is, in most cases, very scanty, and often indeed wholly neglected ; so that when they commence the business of self-cultivation, they labour under the serious disadvantage of having no capital, if one may so speak, to begin with ; they are therefore compelled to

commence with the very elements of knowledge, and are obliged to spend a great deal of time and labour in laying the foundation of learning in their minds, —and all this they have to do in the fragments of time which they can snatch from business, and with physical energies often enfeebled with toil, and with minds discomposed with the anxieties of a dependant condition.

But while a comparatively indigent condition is thus barren of external resources, it is not wholly without counter-balancing advantages. If it be unproductive of the outward means of improvement, it is not unfriendly to the growth of those hardy virtues, by which means are made subservient to their natural purposes. A poor man, by the necessities of his circumstances, generally acquires habits of care, industry, patience, and self-denial; and with these internal resources thousands have been enabled to climb the ascent of science by the most gloomy, the most rugged, and unbeaten path. These habits are even more unexceptionably necessary to success in learning than in business: he who has skill and capital may succeed in the latter with very little effort or attention. But a man cannot cultivate his understanding as he can his fields, by hired labour. Nothing can be substituted here for personal exertion. There is no royal road to learning. The rich may indeed secure abler guides and ampler refreshments than the poor; yet all the guides and stimulants they can command will not enable them to dispense with severe and unwearied personal application.

A sufficient supply of suitable books is one of the most imposing, and certainly the most substantially valuable benefits that wealth confers upon the student; but evils have been seen to grow out of this benefit. Some, for want of prudence, are bewildered in an immense variety, and contract a habit of reading superficially and to no purpose; others suffer themselves to be so occupied with reading as to neglect the more important business of close thinking; they rest satisfied with a kind of second hand learning; being furnished so abundantly with the fruits of other men's minds, they are careless about maturing those of their own; and perhaps do not suspect that what *reads* so easy and pleasant, has been written with great mental effort. Such persons find it easier to remember than to reason, to establish a proposition by authority than by argument; and their want of sound learning is supplied by their dexterity in citations and their extensive knowledge of the names of authors.

Want of books is acknowledged to be, in some respects, an irreparable privation to the poor scholar. But if he have few books, he will be more prudent in his selection, and more careful in the perusal of those he has. And the very scantiness of his reading leaves him more opportunity for exercising his own thoughts; and such an exercise of thought is rendered necessary by the imperfect information that he derives from books. Unable to fortify his opinions by authority, he is compelled with more care to dig for the broad and firm foundation of reason: that being firmly fixed there, his

positions may stand without the adventitious aid of agreeing intellects.

In confirmation of these views, it may be observed, that self-taught scholars are frequently distinguished for the strength and originality of their thoughts. The productions of such minds may be deficient in elegance and polish; they may have excrescencies and defects which a regular education would have enabled them to avoid; but they generally exhibit a native vigour and a healthy bloom, which procures them the respect of those who can appreciate real excellence, and which enables them to live in the esteem of the public, when the sickly offspring of many a polished scholar is consigned to the grave of oblivion.

Some of the most gigantic intellects that have ever lived have been reared in the hardy region of adversity: the names of Erasmus and Dr. Johnson will sufficiently verify this assertion; and to these may be added the names of Kepler, Heyne, Parr, and a host of others who spent a great part of their lives in poverty.

A state of poverty is unhappily unfavourable to the acquisition of a *taste* for learning; but where the taste is acquired in that condition, it may generally be observed to be of a very exquisite and powerful kind. The reason is obvious, intellectual pursuits furnish the poor man with a pleasure or an amusement at once cheap, innocent, noble, and in the highest degree gratifying. At the same time, it opens to him prospects of usefulness, distinction, and even wealth, which his civil condition

would have forbid him to hope for ; such prospects, to a man in humble and indigent circumstances, operates as an incentive to exertion, of which the rich can hardly conceive the force.

The principal design of what has been advanced is to prove, that there is nothing in poverty—if we except the most abject kind—that can absolutely prevent a person from cultivating his mind, if he possesses suitable resolution to do so ; but we have not intended to teach, that a state of poverty, generally speaking, is more favourable to mental improvement than a state of affluence, or independence on business. Such a notion would be disproved by the existing state of society. So far as outward means and opportunities are concerned, all the advantages are with opulence ; and if the moral seductions of opulence can be resisted, it is unquestionably the more favourable condition for the pursuit of knowledge. But then it is to be considered, that these very advantages, without great care, will generate vicious habits, which will neutralize and render utterly useless the most valuable means of improvement. The poor, on the other hand, have to maintain an incessant struggle with privation and difficulty ; their progress is consequently, at first, slow and doubtful : but that very struggle calls into exercise some of the noblest virtues of the human character, and imparts an internal energy, which enables them eventually to triumph over every difficulty. Self-denial, industry, and resolution, are equally as necessary to enable the wealthy student to resist the silent and

beguiling temptations of his condition, as to enable the poor one to withstand the rude and harrassing attacks of his: but there is this difference—the weapons of the former are apt to lose their temper by contact with the enemy, while contest only operates on those of the other, to harden and point to greater keenness.

From this comparative survey of literary advantages, as they are affected by the possession, or the want of property, we now direct our attention to the leading departments of business, in their respective influence on literary and theological studies.

Local preachers in their secular capacity may be divided into two general classes. First—those that are employed in manual or laborious occupations, or such as require muscular rather than mental exertion. In this class are the agricultural population, mechanics, and the lower orders of artists. In the other, must be ranked those who are engaged in the learned professions of law, physic, and education, practitioners of the elegant arts, and those commercial men, who have the management and supervision of extensive transactions, and many subordinate agents, and in fact all whose employments task the intellect rather than the hands.

These intellectual callings are hostile to the requisite studies of a lay preacher, not chiefly because they make large demands on the time;—though that is often the case—but because they so deeply tax the resources of the mind itself. For when the mind is wearied by long and laborious

exercise, it requires, in its intervals of remission from business, some lighter exercise than the study of divinity. Indeed, when the engagements of this class of men are very burdensome and extensive, and the required attention scrupulous and unre-mitted, it would be perhaps improper for them to attempt to preach at all.

The arduous duties of medical men, for instance, are attended with a peculiar uncertainty, which, if united with extensive practice, would exempt them from the office.

But after making these exceptions, we still affirm, that the majority of those who are engaged in these superior departments of business, might fulfil the duties of an occasional preacher without prejudice either to their proper vocation or their personal comfort: if they have peculiar hinderances, they have also higher advantages. They enjoy the advantage of an education superior to that of the lower orders;—they have generally more leisure and retirement at their command;—a better supply of books;—and they have minds which, if often fatigued with exertion, are by that very exertion rendered quicker in their perceptions and more intellectual in their character. There are thousands who are engaged in arduous professions, that find time for the cultivation of general literature; and no reason can be assigned why these persons might not, if they were disposed, study divinity as well as any other science that lies out of the walk of their ordinary vocation.

But the greatest number of lay preachers are of

that class which move in those lower spheres of business to which we have alluded : and perhaps one reason why they are more numerous here than elsewhere is, that their secular condition is, upon the whole, less unfavourable to theological pursuits, than that of the last mentioned characters. These laborious occupations, however, are not without much that is unfriendly to the ministerial character. Their principal hostility lies in the peculiar discouragements they present to the acquisition of a taste for learning. Receiving in most cases little education in their early years, such persons usually grow up in a state of estrangement from all intellectual pursuits ; and hence they have not an opportunity of verifying by experience the value and pleasures of learning : and in subsequent life their companions and pursuits are rarely at all calculated to awaken in their minds any desire for it. Besides their employments often produce such fatigue as to unfit them for study, and sometimes even leaves them but little time for it. In addition to all this, they often want books, retirement, and encouragement from friends, for ignorant people are strangely inclined to believe that a working man must neglect his business, if he spend his leisure in books.

But notwithstanding the unkindly influence which laborious occupations in all these respects, exerts on study, we still retain the opinion already expressed, that they are more friendly than the generality of the more respectable callings. For though they may occasion fatigue enough to the

body, the exercise which they impose upon the mind, is rarely either constant or severe. The performance of many agricultural labours, as well as those connected with most of the ordinary crafts may, by habit, become compatible with surprising abstraction of mind. By this means, study may often coexist with labour.

It is related of Robert Bloomfield, the author of the *Farmer's Boy*, that he composed that poem while he sat plying his trade as a shoe-maker, surrounded by six or seven other workmen ; and what is more astonishing, amidst the elements of confusion and disturbance with which he would be surrounded, he had composed one half of it before he committed a line to paper. A minister, whose name is not now recollected, acquired, it is said, the habit of studying with great facility while walking in the crowded streets of the Metropolis ! These are instances among many others that might be adduced of the force of habit. They prove what surprising difficulties may be conquered by persevering practice. But habit will do more than merely conquer difficulties ; it will seem to change their very nature, and make those very situations and employments which appear unconquerably adverse to study, even subservient to it. Thus, if the studious ploughman or cobbler were translated from the scene of his labours into a private room furnished with every literary accommodation, the flow of his ideas would probably cease : the impediments of his former condition had only served to quicken the current ; but in the smooth channel

of privacy and inaction, his thoughts would stagnate or be absorbed by the splendid novelties around him.

But when circumstances render this combination of business and study inconvenient, the individual, by the repose which his mind has enjoyed through the day, returns to his evening or morning studies*

* Too much has never been said in favour of the practice of early rising. Regularly to secure an hour or two before the business of the day commences for retired meditation and prayer, cannot but be attended with the happiest effects. It would, in the first place, be always inoffensive and generally beneficial to health; it would be reclaiming a portion of time, and that the very best, from the *waste* of every day, and converting it into a fruitful source of mental and moral improvement; and the very *self denial* of the practice would contribute to the stability of the moral character, while the opportunity it would allow for deliberate prayer and scripture reading, would greatly tend to improve the personal piety.

A man who lies in bed until necessary business, or domestic arrangements compel him to rise, must rise with the uncomfortable reflection, that he has bartered a valuable portion of time for a despicable gratification. Hurry and dissipation will exclude reflection, and want of time will furnish him with an irresistible temptation to abbreviate his devotions; and thus, rushing into the battle unarmed, what can he expect but to be foiled; commencing with a foolish irregularity, who can wonder that irregularity and folly should mark his progress through the day. Thus an hour in the morning employed in pious and intellectual exercises, is not only peculiarly valuable for its own sake, as being the time when the mind is best fitted for exertion, and when people, in general, can most easily command retirement, but it is chiefly valuable on account of its influence on all the other parts of the day. The habit of early rising however, like most other very valuable things, is only acquired by few. Its acquisition seems to demand a resolution and perseverance, that few are disposed to exert.

with renovated vigour and alacrity. And farther, though their retirement be limited in its duration, and often perhaps invaded by intruders, it is not invaded by those engrossing anxieties, which every where follow the individual whose duties are responsible and embarrassing.

To institute a comparative estimate of individual trades in their influence on the pursuit of knowledge, would be too wide a speculation, and might not perhaps lead to any very satisfactory results. It may not however be improper to notice those *species* of trades, or rather labours which are distinguished as *active* or *sedentary*. Of the former kind the employments of husbandry are those to which we would confine our attention. We have been inclined to think very highly of these rural pursuits as they affect the mind, and to believe them in this respect considerably superior to the confined and motionless labours of tailors, shoemakers, &c. But historic facts are unfortunately hostile to our views: for in the list of self-taught philosophers, given us in a recent publication, we have been mortified to find that so few have been furnished by the rural population, and rather amazed at the number of learned weavers, tailors, and shoemakers. This circumstance is noticed by the author of the publication just alluded to, who is thence inclined to believe that these sitting trades are peculiarly favourable to mental improvement. Perhaps this fact, if it be one, may be accounted for by the uniformity and stillness of their employments, and the very little variety in the objects that

surround them, which naturally leave the mind more at liberty to think, and often induce them to resort to books and study as some relief from the monotony of their daily avocations. To this must be added, that these domestic employments, by bringing men more together, permit conversation, and render it inviting.

The fact cannot be denied, that there are comparatively few literary characters, among the class of working farmers. The employment does not seem calculated to awaken the desire for learning: the bustle and variety of their employments, the multiplicity of surrounding objects, and their scattered mode of working and living, are all unfriendly to the exercise of the mental powers. Yet we must still be allowed to believe that those of them who are really in earnest for learning, have no reason to think themselves unhappily situated. They can command rather more leisure than almost any ordinary trade. Some of their employments are not only compatible, but highly favourable, to the most abstract study: and if they often want suitable companions, they are not often annoyed with worthless company. If field employment be less favourable to the study of the exact sciences than some of the more secluded and noiseless trades, it is at least calculated to supply the imagination with images, and by this means must be very useful to a preacher.

CHAPTER VI.

Examples of the successful Pursuit of Knowledge under difficulties.

IN order to succeed in the acquisition of any branch of knowledge, or in the attainment of skill in the performance of any practical art, a conviction of the *possibility* of success is essentially necessary, and is a matter of primary importance: for, without such conviction, there can be no firmness of resolution; and without resolution, the requisite efforts cannot be made, or made with sufficient perseverance.

And when external circumstances are unpropitious, and formidable difficulties crowd the path, doubts on this head are very ready to present themselves: but doubts entertained here would immediately quench animation and paralyze effort: for who would persist in travelling to a place which he believes he shall never be able to reach? or who would attempt to run a race, who knows he is not to be the winner?

Now among other remedies for this incredulity, the most efficacious must be, the consideration of real examples of success in cases similar to our own. With this view, the following instances of the triumphs of vigorous perseverance in defiance

of appalling difficulties, are presented to the reader. They will serve, at least, to rescue the course of study and mental application, which have been recommended from the charge of impracticability, and to shew that in estimating the force of steady and determined application, we have not been betrayed into exaggerated conclusions.

We have already, by a sort of argumentative process, endeavoured to demonstrate the possibility of successful study under outward difficulties : but argument may be opposed by argument, and opposed by those too who possess the mischievous faculty of making the worse appear the better reason ; but arguments are vain when opposed to facts. Facts are too palpable to be eluded, and too obstinate to be overthrown.

* Sir William Jones, it is well known, was a prodigy of learning. Yet all his philosophical and literary studies were carried on among the duties of a toilsome profession, which he was nevertheless so far from neglecting, that his attention to all its demands on his time and faculties, constituted one of the most remarkable of his claims to our admiration. But the grand secret of his vast attainments, was his uncommon industry. Even at school his voluntary exertions exceeded in amount his prescribed tasks. Dr. Thackeray, one of his masters, was wont to say of him, that he was

* For the following examples of literary industry, the author is indebted to a work recently published, entitled—"The Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties ;" a most interesting and useful compilation, and which may be strongly recommended to local preachers.

a boy of so active a mind, that if he were left naked and friendless on Salisbury plain, he would nevertheless find the road to fame and riches.

Sir William Jones adopted and perseveringly exemplified the two following maxims : — first, never to neglect an opportunity of improvement ; — secondly, that whatever had been attained, was attainable by him, and that therefore the real or supposed difficulties of any pursuit formed no reason why he should not engage in it. But what seems more particularly to have enabled him to employ his talents to his own and the public advantage was, the regular allotment of his time to particular occupations, and a scrupulous adherence to the distribution which he had fixed ; hence all his studies were pursued without interruption or confusion.

It has been said of Cicero, that no man whose life has been wholly spent in study, ever left more numerous or more valuable fruits of his learning in every branch of science and the polite arts—in oratory, poetry, philosophy, law, history, criticism, politics, in each of which he equalled the greatest masters of his times ; in some of them excelled all men in all times. His remaining works, as voluminous as they appear, are but a small part of what he really published. His industry was incredible beyond the example, or even conception of our days : this was the secret by which he performed such wonders, and reconciled perpetual study with perpetual affairs. He suffered no part of his leisure to be idle, or the least interval of it to be lost.

These are the words of his learned and eloquent biographer, Dr. Middleton. He says himself in one of his orations :—"What others give to their own affairs, to the public shows and other entertainments, to festivity, to amusement,—nay, even to mental and bodily rest, I give to study and philosophy." He tells us too in his letters, that on his days of business, when he had any thing particular to compose, he had no other time for meditating but when he was taking a few turns in his walks, where he used to dictate his thoughts to his amanuensis, or scribe who attended him. His letters afford us, indeed, in every way, the most remarkable evidence of the active habits of his life. Those that have come down to us, were all written after he was forty years old ; and although many of course are lost, they amount in number to about a thousand." "We find many of them"—says Doctor Middleton,—“dated before day light: some from the senate ; others from his meals ; and the crowd of his morning levee.” “For me,” he himself exclaims, addressing one of his friends, “*ne otium quidem unquam otiosum*,”—even my leisure hours have their occupations.

Pope Adrian the Sixth was the son of a poor barge builder, of Utrecht, who, desirous of procuring for his son a good education, and yet unable to pay for it, found means at last to get him admitted amongst the boys educated gratuitously at the University of Louvaine. While attending this seminary, however, the pecuniary resources of the young scholar were so extremely scanty that he was

unable to afford himself candles, whereby to study at night. But he did not on that account spend his time in idleness. He used to take his station, we are told, with his book in his hand in the church porches, or at the corners of the streets, where lamps are generally kept burning, and to read by their light.

After passing through a succession of ecclesiastical preferments, which he owed to his eminent acquirements and unimpeachable character.— Adrian was appointed preceptor to the young Archduke Charles, grandson to Ferdinand, king of Spain, who afterwards became so powerful and celebrated under the title of the Emperor Charles the Fifth. To this connection he was indebted for his elevation to the papal throne, which he ascended in the sixty-second year of his age, and occupied it for two years, having died in 1523. The short time he held this lofty station was not however the happiest period of Adrian's life, as the following inscription, which he desired might be placed over his tomb may testify : — “ Here lies Adrian the Sixth, who esteemed no misfortune which happened to him in his life, so great as his being called to govern.”

The celebrated Grotius was one of the most remarkable instances on record of the success with which the cultivation of general literature may be carried on together with legal and political studies, and even amidst the toils and distractions of a public life of unusual bustle and vicissitude. From his sixteenth year, when he first appeared at the

bar, till that of his death at the age of sixty-two. Grotius was scarcely ever released from the burden of political employment, except while he lay in prison, or altogether exiled from his country, wandered about from one foreign land to another in search of a temporary home. Yet even in these seemingly unpropitious circumstances, he produced a succession of works, the very titles of which, it would require several pages to enumerate, all display profound erudition, and not a few of them ranking to this very day, with the very best, or as the very best that have been written on the subject to which they relate.

Mr. Gifford who was for several years the learned Editor of the *Quarterly Review*, was apprenticed to a shoemaker. He has given us the following touching account of his poverty and perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge at the time of his apprenticeship. He had a strong desire to be acquainted with Mathematics. "But I possessed at this time," he observes, "but one book in the world: it was a treatise on Algebra, given to me by a young woman, who had found it in a lodging house. I considered it as a treasure; but it was a treasure locked up; for it supposed the reader to be acquainted with simple equations, and I knew nothing of the matter. My master's son had purchased Fenning's Introduction; this was precisely what I wanted—but he carefully concealed it from me, and I was indebted to chance alone for stumbling upon his hiding place. I sat up for the

greatest part of several nights successively, and, before he suspected that his treatise was discovered, had completely mastered it : I could now enter upon my own : and that carried me pretty far into the science. This was not done without difficulty. I had not a farthing on earth, nor a friend to give me one ; pen, ink, and paper, therefore, (in despite of the flippant remark of Lord Orford,) were for the most part as far out of my reach as a crown and sceptre. There was indeed a resource, but the utmost caution and secrecy were necessary in applying it. I beat out pieces of leather as smooth as possible, and wrought my problems on them with a blunted awl ; for the rest my memory was tenacious, and I could multiply and divide by it to a great extent."

No situation, it is obvious, could be more unfavourable for study than this ; and yet we see how the eager student succeeded in triumphing over its disadvantages, contriving to write and calculate even without pens, paper, and ink, by the aid of a piece of leather and a blunted awl.

When there is a strong determination to attain an object, it rarely fails of discovering the requisite means of doing so ; and almost any means are sufficient. We mistake in supposing there is only one way of doing a thing, namely, that in which it is commonly done. Whenever we have [to] prove it we find how rich in resources is Necessity ; and how seldom it is, that in the absence of the ordinary instrument, she has not some new invention to supply its place. This is a truth of which the studi-

ous have often had experience, and been all the better for experiencing; for difficulties so encountered and subdued, not only whet ingenuity, but strengthen a man's whole intellectual and moral character, and fit him for struggles and achievements in after life, from which other spirits less hardily trained, would turn away in despair.

These remarks were strikingly exemplified in the literary career of the well known Mathematician, Thomas Simpson, of whom it has been said, that his first acquaintance with books was formed during moments stolen from almost incessant labour, and cost him his domestic peace, the favour of his friends, and, finally, the shelter of his father's roof. He never had afterwards either any master to instruct him, or any friend to assist him in providing for the necessities of the passing day; but on the contrary, when he wished to make himself acquainted with any new subject, he could with difficulty find a book out of which to study it, and had a family to support at an age, when many have scarcely begun even to maintain themselves. Yet with both his days and his evenings employed in toiling for a subsistence, he found time for intellectual acquisitions, such as to a less industrious and ardent student would have sufficed for the occupation of a whole life. This is a striking proof how independant we really are, if we choose, of those external circumstances which seem to make so vast a difference between the situation of man and man; and how possible it is for us in any situation at least to enrich our minds, if all other

riches are denied us. It is the general ignorance of this great truth, or indifference to it, that prevents it from being oftener exemplified; and it would be rendering a high service to the human species, if we could awaken men's minds to a sufficiently lively trust in it, and a steady sense of its importance.

It is related of the learned Dr. Alexander Murray, that of his short life, scarcely half was passed amidst those opportunities which usually lead to study and the acquisition of knowledge. The earlier part of it was a continual struggle with every thing that tends most to depress intellectual exertion, and to extinguish the very desire of learning. Yet in all the poverty, and the many other difficulties, with which he had for his first eighteen years to contend, he went on pursuing his work of self cultivation, not only as eagerly and steadily, but almost as successfully as he afterwards did, when surrounded by all the accommodations of study.

Bunyan wrote his celebrated Allegory in prison; in the same situation, Cervantes wrote his admirable *Don Quixote*. Homer and Milton were both blind when they composed their inimitable Poems. Julius Cæsar wrote his famous Commentaries amidst the tumults and fatigues of war and campaigns. Polybius too was a soldier, as well as the French philosopher, Des Cartes, and our own Ben Jonson. Simpson, the great Mathematician, was a weaver, and was married and had a family in very early life; so that no starting place for a literary career, one should think, could well be more hope-

less and awkward, than that of a man, who beside many other disadvantages, had already a family to maintain, almost before he had commenced his education, and no other means of doing so except a profession which necessarily excluded him from any association with the literary world. Yet amidst the cares and vexations of poverty, and the fatigues of hard and unceasing labour, this extraordinary man made his most important advances in scientific knowledge.

Erasmus and Doctor Johnson, two of the most accomplished scholars that ever lived, had to grapple with poverty during the greatest part of their lives. This was also the case with the illustrious Kepler, who, amidst all his difficulties, has been heard to say, that he would rather be the author of the works he had written, than possess the Dutchy of Saxony.

Considerable as are the disadvantages which those persons have to contend with, who begin their acquaintance with books only late in life ; it ought not to be forgotten on the other hand, that all the chances of the race are not against them.—The time they have lost and are anxious to redeem of itself give a stimulus that will make up for many disadvantages. Although they have not yet learned much from books, they have nevertheless of necessity learned a great deal from other sources ; and they come to their studies too with faculties, which if not quite so pliant as those of childhood, have much more vigour and comprehension.

Richardson was in his fifty-second year when he

commenced the composition of his *Paméla*.—Cowper was about the same age when the first volume of his *Poems* appeared.—Doctor Young was upwards of sixty years old when he wrote his *Night Thoughts*, and his *Conjecture on Original Composition*, and his *Poem on Resignation* were composed when he was turned fourscore.

William Hutton, the historian of Birmingham and Derby, and author of several other works, has informed us that he had reached his twenty-third year before he had begun to take a liking to books, and he was nearly sixty when his first publication appeared. This man was born and passed all the earlier part of his life in the very humblest condition of poverty, and suffered incredible hardships during his apprenticeship to the business of a stocking weaver. And he deserves particular notice for his amazing industry and perseverance, not only in acquiring literary renown, but also considerable property.

Of self-education, and education obtained in the most humble and unfavourable circumstances, James Ferguson, the Scotch astronomer, and Benjamin Franklin, the American philosopher, furnish striking instances. In the latter, we have a very interesting instance of the wonders that may be achieved by patient and vigorous application, in defiance of external difficulties. No philosopher of his age stood on a prouder eminence than Franklin, for many years before his death.—And this extraordinary man, who had originally been one of the most obscure of the people, had

raised himself to this distinction, almost without the aid of any education, but such as he had given himself. Who will say after reading his story, that any thing more is necessary for the attainment of knowledge, than the determination to attain it? that there is any other obstacle to even the highest degree of intellectual advancement, which may not be overcome, except a man's own listlessness and indolence. The secret of this man's success in the cultivation of his mental powers was, that he was ever awake and active in that business; that he suffered no opportunity of forwarding it to escape him unimproved; that however poor, he found, at least, a few pence, were it even by diminishing his scanty meals, to pay for the loan of the books he could not buy; that however hard wrought, he found a few hours in the week, were it by sitting up half the night, after toiling all the day, to read and study them. Others may not have his original powers of mind; but his industry, his perseverance, his self command, are for the imitation of all; and though few may look forward to the rare fortune of accomplishing discoveries like his, all may derive both instruction and encouragement from his example. They who may never overtake the light, may at least follow its path, and guide their footsteps by its illuminations.

CHAPTER VII.

On the Composition and Delivery of Sermons.

IT is of the utmost importance that every preacher of the Gospel should distinctly and always recollect that it is not by the “might” of argument, nor the “power” of eloquence that the preaching of the Gospel becomes effectual to the conversion of sinners:—“but by my Spirit,” saith the Lord.—Nevertheless this great truth by no means discharges a preacher from endeavouring to the utmost of his power to cultivate the talent of public speaking: for though it may be necessary in order to confound human self sufficiency, that God should sometimes render the preaching of the eloquent unfruitful, and greatly succeed the labours of men whose speech and preaching is any thing but enticing; yet this proceeding is in some sort miraculous, and is to be considered an exception to the general order of things. For after all, real eloquence is naturally adapted to convince the understanding and move the affections; and in the kingdom of grace as in that of nature, the Almighty does not discard suitable instruments and means, and perform his operations by those that are naturally unsuitable, except on rare occasions and for special reasons.

It is therefore the indispensable duty of every preacher to endeavour to acquire, among other things, such a method of handling his subject as is best adapted to explain its nature, demonstrate its truth, exhibit its importance, and dispose the hearer to listen with respectful attention to what he advances. Our Great Lord absolutely requires us to improve all the talents he has entrusted to us to the utmost of our power. And when we consider how great will be the reward of such faithful improvement to ourselves, and how numberless and endless will be the benefits which others may derive from it, we have ample motives to diligence in this duty.

The composition of sermons is an art which submits to general rules ; and although the knowledge of these rules can be of no avail to those who are destitute of a natural talent for preaching, yet they will render material assistance to those who possess it.

This subject, we are aware, has long since been exhausted ; and nothing, therefore, can be written upon it, but what has often, in substance, been written before ; but as these pages may possibly be read by some young preacher, who does not enjoy the benefit of oral instruction, or the opportunity of consulting other works, it would be improper to pass over the subject without notice ; and it is solely to such persons that the following remarks are addressed.

We commence them by recommending *prudence in the selection of subjects and texts*.

This caution, however apparently trivial, is really important ; for imprudence in this matter, is not only a considerable evil, but with young preachers a very common one. Youthful minds, in the sanguine and eager confidence of inexperience, are often tempted to dogmatize in unsettled, or speculate in mysterious regions ; but the discussion of mysterious or disputable points, demands an acuteness of intellect, a maturity of judgment, and a command of temper, which are rarely possessed by the young ; and under any circumstances, such discussions are not adapted for general edification. This mode of preaching, when resorted to by inexperienced persons, is generally as discreditable to themselves as it is injurious to the cause of truth. In their polemical wars or metaphysical excursions, they not unfrequently procure for themselves the shame of an ignoble retreat before enemies which they have roused and cannot grapple with, or they present the ludicrous spectacle of a person having lost himself in his attempt to guide others. In the selection of subjects, a preacher should consult both his own capacity and that of his hearers. If he be a young beginner, and his auditory in general very ignorant, he has a twofold reason for abstaining from subjects that would lead him to disputations and bewildering speculations, and for choosing those that are plain and easy ; and such

are all those that are of vital importance. Of this number may be considered the natural depravity of the human heart, the influences of the Holy Spirit, the atonement, repentance, faith, justification, the new birth, purity of heart, and practical obedience to the law of God, with the various christian tempers and virtues, and their opposite vices :—to these may be added, such general subjects, as the pleasures and advantages of religion, man's accountability, the brevity and precariousness of life, and the rewards and punishments of a future state. As these subjects are of the greatest importance, so they are the least difficult to manage in discussion : any of them are sufficiently profound to exercise the most exalted understanding ; yet, being matters of clear revelation, and generally of practice and experience, they are not beyond the reach of ordinary minds.

To a suitable subject should be added an appropriate text ; that is, a text which *unequivocally* contains the subject of discourse.

To choose a passage of Scripture which has but a remote or doubtful connexion with the theme of discourse, could only be pardonable if a more suitable one could not be found ;—a case which never can happen.

From the days of Origen to the present, there has existed a generation of preachers who have possessed the singular faculty of discovering evangelical truths where ordinary people never suspect them to exist. But this is by no means a desirable talent.

If the mere existence of analogy entitles a passage of Scripture, to be employed as a text, there would be no end of spiritualizing; since there is scarcely any natural object or event, that a fanciful person may not think analogous to some religious truth. When we can be assured that the Holy Ghost intended to use the words allegorically as well as literally, then, of course, we may so use them; but when no such intention is apparent, the practice is unwarrantable and absurd. Caleb's encouraging exhortation to the Israelites to go up and possess the land of promise; the history of Jonah's Gourd; the parable of the prodigal son; may be named as specimens of passages fairly admitting a spiritual application, because such an application is evidently designed; and there are indeed thousands of passages that bear a typical, as well as, a literal signification. But the following have been employed as texts:—"The king's business requires haste." "I have a message from God unto thee." "They fearing lest they should fall upon rocks cast four anchors out of the ship." "Who shall roll us away the stone." "Escape for thy life," &c. Now it is acknowledged that these, and many such passages bear some analogy to spiritual subjects; and it might not be improper incidentally to allude to them, or employ them as passing figures in the course of a sermon, but as it is impossible to prove that they were ever intended to bear any other import than their literal one, it is perfectly gratuitous and arbitrary *formally*

to build discourses upon them, or deduce from them the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel.*

Those preachers who are attached to texts of this sort, should be reminded, that a similar practice prevails in no other department of public speaking, nor would it be tolerated. It is not, indeed, common for lectures on scientific subjects, or speakers in the senate or at the bar, to take texts at all or not in the formal manner that is done in the pulpit; and the practice here seems to be rather accidental than otherwise; or it may arise from the circumstance that the preacher has an infallible text book. But suppose texts were common on other occasions,—which, at least, is conceivable,—what would be thought of a speaker who should deduce his doctrines from a passage in which no such doctrines were referred to, or contemplated, and which had no relation to his subject except what [arose from a distant analogy? truly he would be thought an egregious trifler, if not destitute of common sense. Even those writers who

* “A certain preacher took this passage for a text, ‘Wilt thou go with this man?’ And without adverting to the meaning of his text he first considered the character of the man Christ Jesus; and secondly, urged sinners to go with him to the heavenly Canaan. Another took these words, ‘Up, get ye out of this place!’ and his whole sermon was founded on the word ‘up.’ To sinners he said, up into repentance; to penitents, up into justification; to the justified, up into sanctification; and to the sanctified, up into glory. He asked me how I should preach from it, to which I replied, I should have said, ‘Up out of bed, and make your escape from this devoted city.’ No doubt these good men said many useful things; but they evidently perverted the word of God, and made a jingle of words the basis of their sermons.”—*Rev. J. Edmondson.*

deem it expedient to station at the head of their productions, short quotations by way of motto, always endeavour to select such as have an unquestionable reference to their subject, and such likewise as they believe the author intended to have this reference.

The term *accommodation* has been gravely applied to this trifling practice; but with what propriety is not very apparent. For when a text is forced to speak a language which it was not intended to speak, and when a discourse is yoked to a text unlike itself and unworthy of its subject, neither of them can be said to be very civilly treated. It is proper however to observe that this *spiritualizing* which we here condemn, is widely different from what may be called *moralizing*. Many of the facts of Sacred History suggest a very striking *moral*, the exhibition of which forms a very interesting mode of preaching.

In the selection of subjects and texts there is evident room for the interposing guidance of the Holy Spirit, that interposition should therefore be sought in earnest prayer, before a single step is taken in the business.

As every preacher ought unquestionably to understand the subject which he proposes to discuss, so it is equally necessary that he should in the first place critically understand his text. "Propose," says Mr. Edmondson, "this question to yourselves. What is the meaning of the Holy Ghost in this passage?" And do not presume to preach from it till you have fully discovered that meaning, lest

you should expose your ignorance and mislead your hearers. That you may understand your text, observe the following rules : first, read the context with care, and in the original if you are able to do so ; secondly, examine all the parallel passages which you find in the marginal references of the Bible ; thirdly, examine the meaning of every important word in the passage ; fourthly, consider the design of the whole, for on that your superstructure must be built ; and lastly, consult commentators of established reputation. I mention commentators last, because, in my opinion, you should always use your own judgment before you seek the aid of others. But you should not attempt either to divide your text, or to collect matter to fill up your sermon, till you have ascertained its genuine import ; for in either case you work in the dark, and build without a solid foundation." To these remarks we add, that a preacher who critically understands his text, will seldom be at a loss about dividing it ; its parts or divisions in that case, being naturally suggested to his mind.

An appropriate introduction is an important part of a sermon. Much depends upon the impression which is made on the hearer at the commencement ; it is then that the preacher should strive to attract his attention and encourage his expectation. A few weighty, pointed, and interesting remarks in the introduction, will create an impression highly favourable to the reception of the sermon ; it will predispose the hearers to listen with respectful attention : whereas a confused, improper, and

tedious exordium, will produce effects directly opposite.

No precise laws can be prescribed for the regulation of introductions; they will necessarily vary with varying circumstances and occasions, and with the diversified tastes of preachers. Sometimes the introduction may be properly employed in unfolding the literal import and relative bearing of the text; and often, in general observations illustrative of the subject about to be discussed. It is generally recommended to defer composing the introduction until the sermon is finished; because that something more appropriate might be suggested for that purpose during the course of meditation on the subject than is likely to occur to us, before we commence. “Your introduction should be composed, in general, after you have formed the plan of your sermon; that you may conduct your hearers into the building you have erected in the most pleasant and agreeable way. Then your whole plan is before you, in all its bearing; and you can see clearly to introduce it to the best advantage. But how can you form a correct idea on this subject before you know what your sermon will contain.” * But whatever be the materials of an introduction, and whenever made, it must be short, pithy, and proper to the subject.

The divisions and arrangements of a discourse, as they form its skeleton or frame-work, must be natural and perspicuous:—a blunder here would

* Edmondson's Essay on the Christian Ministry.

spoil the whole fabric. A happy arrangement of a sermon is not more desirable than it is difficult. This difficulty some attempt to surmount by resorting to the help of *skeletons* ready made; but we are inclined to suspect the utility of such skeletons so employed; we fear they have too often the effect of inducing in young ministers a lazy dependance on external aid, while the energies of their own minds are not roused into action. If a preacher be able, by the due exertion of his own powers, to conceive a just and comprehensive idea of the precise subject of the text, and the precise nature of that subject, he will be able to dispense with the skeleton book: such a comprehension of the subject would not fail to suggest the proper method of treating it; and, at all events, it is better that the plan of a discourse be the preacher's own, if it have imperfections, than a borrowed one: for it may be admitted, as an axiom, that no one ought to attempt to discuss a subject of which he is not master. There is an independance in true genius which would tax its own resources to the uttermost rather than become a pensioner on the skeleton book. And when true genius is wanting, it is vain to attempt to supply it by adopting the sermons of other men; the practice might succeed for a short time, but such preachers always in the end fall into contempt: they resemble persons trying to walk on stilts—an undignified elevation at best, and always supported with extreme difficulty. Many young preachers have been known to set off with great eclat; but by and by it came

out that their capital was borrowed, and then their popularity suddenly became extinct. Others have risen to eminence slowly and from very humble beginnings; their sermons at first were neither elegant in composition, rich in matter, nor happy in arrangement; but they were their own; and their little stock, by prudent and strenuous management gradually increased and multiplied.

The heads of a discourse should not be needlessly multiplied, but as few and briefly expressed as is consistent with a clear explication of the intended plan. A previous statement of the method in which the subject is intended to be treated, may not be always necessary; but in general, the practice affords such substantial assistance to the recollection both of the preacher and the hearer, that it ought not to be disused for the sake of avoiding an old fashioned custom.

A sermon should have that property which rhetoricians call *unity*: that is, it should have a general or leading subject which must always be kept in view, and towards which all the parts of the discourse should radiate as to a common centre. Every person who attempts to speak in public, whether in the senate, at the bar, or any where else, is supposed to have a definite object in view, towards which he is expected constantly to aim: if he lose sight of this point, and enter upon topics which have no clear relation to it, his hearers necessarily feel dissatisfied, and deem him to have committed a capital error. Now there are few texts that can be chosen, but are more or less sus-

ceptible of this unity ; and hence a sermon ought not to be a bundle of incoherent sentences, but a *system*, in which though there may be subordinate parts, remote particulars, and sometimes even seeming digressions, yet all should naturally arise out of the text, and be calculated in some way to illustrate it.

Inability to maintain this quality of a sermon, is an unfailing indication of the absence of preaching gifts. Whenever you hear a man straying from his text, and talking about things quite foreign to it, you may certainly conclude, that he is no preacher, or at least, that he is ignorant of the first principles of composition.

In order to do justice to his subject, a preacher should give it the benefit of close and patient thought. Close thinking, however, is a habit which demands considerable resolution and perseverance to acquire ; for the mind naturally revolts at severe application ; and too many, yielding to their natural indolence, presumptuously enter the pulpit without due preparation. The sermons of such persons are easy to distinguish from those of the man who thinks deeply and for himself : these will discover a vein of good sense and originality which will give them substantial value, the other will consist of mere common-place, inappropriate, and often blundering remarks, of superficial declamation ; or perhaps they will be a kind of patch work, collected from commentators, sermon writers, and poets. Some preachers it is said, are incapable of profound thought ; to which we reply, if this

be a *natural* incapacity, they are not fit to be preachers; if a *moral* one, which is generally the case, it admits of a remedy. The resources of ordinary minds are much more considerable than some people are willing to believe. A man who has the courage to trust to his own powers, and the resolution to exert them to the uttermost, will often accomplish wonders. Exercise improves the strength of the mind as it does that of the body,—it rouses the dormant faculties, and calls into exercise their natural elasticity.

With respect to the principal matter of a sermon, we take the liberty of borrowing the following sensible remarks from Mr. Edmondson. “Having formed a correct division of your text, proceed to collect useful materials to fill up your sermon. In this part of your work, attend to the following rules:—study the meaning of important words; prepare clear definitions of things; collect strong proofs of every proposition; and provide ample materials for the illustration of the whole. First, study the meaning of important words. There are many weighty words in the Sacred Writings, which are not understood by your unlearned hearers. These should be made plain to every capacity; for without a knowledge of words, there can be no knowledge of things. But our explanation of words should be short, clear, and impressive; and then they will be remembered to considerable advantage. It has been asserted, that the same word has different and contrary meaning in the Holy Scriptures; but if this be true, we shall always be at a loss to

understand the sacred writers. That the same word has different applications, is certain ; but its radical meaning, except in figurative language, is always the same wherever it occurs. Thus the word *salvation*, which always signifies *a deliverance from evil and danger*, is sometimes applied to *temporal* deliverances, and at other times to those which are *spiritual* and *eternal*. Similar observations might be made on many other words which are supposed to have very different meanings ; but a judicious divine will always take great care to explain these words so as to leave no doubt or uncertainty on the minds of his sensible hearers.

Secondly, prepare clear definitions of things.—Much depends upon clear and correct definition. It smooths the path of a preacher ; and opens the eyes of the hearers. Many painful disputes have arisen in the religious world from a want of clear definitions : for when men understand one another, there is not that wide difference in opinion which is generally supposed. Many writers and speakers whose definitions are obscure, are not understood ; and when a man is misunderstood in any thing he advances, he is always misrepresented. Your definitions should be as clear as the light of day, and then they will carry conviction to all intelligent men ; but if you fail in this part of your work, confusion will follow, and you contend in all your arguings with mere shadows.

Thirdly, collect strong proofs of every proposition in your text. The proofs of every doctrine which you advance, and the reasons of every duty

which you urge, should be strong, clear, and undeniable ; and as the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, your arguments should be drawn from that source. Different subjects will require different proofs ; and these should be selected with great care. To assert any thing without proof, will lower you in the eyes of sensible men ; in that case, the truth will suffer, and unbelievers will triumph. There is no part of your subject which requires greater attention than this ; for your success depends upon it in a high degree.

Fourthly, to provide materials for the apt illustration of every part of your subject, is necessary in the study of your sermons. These may be drawn from various sources :—the works of creation, history, biography, and the sciences, may be pressed into this service ; but the Sacred Writings should be the principal source of all you bring to illustrate your sermons. There you have an inexhaustible fund of the best materials ; for such is the rich variety in these books, that whatever your subject may be, you will be furnished with ample materials for its illustration.

In the composition of your sermons, keep an eye to every serious objection which may be urged against the truth, and prepare short, clear, and pertinent answers. You have to do with men of widely different views and feelings ; one is an infidel, another is a fastidious critic, another is a doubting christian, and another is a self-convicted penitent ;—but all must be met by fair argument. Some preachers answer objections after they have

passed through their sermon ; but this is not the best method. You should clear your way as you go along ; and leave nothing behind that is dark or doubtful."

Thus far our judicious author. We may be permitted to add, that as a sermon should have an appropriate introduction, it should have also a suitable conclusion.

The conclusion or application of a sermon is generally regarded as the most difficult part of it. Perhaps this is true ; for fewer preachers excel in this department of sermonizing than in any other. The conclusion of a discourse should most commonly consist of an application properly so called. That is, an endeavour to impress the practical importance of the subject on the hearer's mind ; to shew him how deeply it concerns him ; to persuade him, by a brief and vivid exhibition of motives, to *practice* what he has heard ; to appeal to his passions—for the passions are the great springs of action. When this part of a discourse is executed with vigour and propriety, it is often the most effectual part. Sometimes a formal application at the conclusion of a sermon, is superseded by the application of each part during the progress of its delivery ; such discourses may be concluded by a few general reflections where very obviously furnished by the subject, or by a brief recapitulation of the principal topics on which we have dilated.—By this means the hearers would often be greatly assisted in their recollections of the sermon.

But of whatever sort the conclusion may be,

it must not be languid and tedious ; but brief and pointed. “ In all discourses,” says Doctor Blair, “ it is a matter of importance to hit the proper time of concluding, so as to bring our discourse just to a point, neither ending abruptly and unexpectedly, nor disappointng the expectation of the hearers when they look for the close, and continue to hover round and round the conclusion, till they become heartily tired of us. We should endeavour to go off with a good grace ; not to end with a languid, drawling sentence, but to close with dignity and spirit, that we may leave the minds of the hearers warm ; and dismiss them with a favourable impression of the speaker and the subject.”

To these admonitions we would add another relative to the *length* of a sermon. Some preachers have contracted the ruinous habit of preaching immoderately long, by which means, if they are men of ordinary talents, they have completely succeeded in making themselves unpopular, as well as of injuring their usefulness. He must have very superior talents who can sustain the animated attention of a congregation for an hour. From half an hour to forty minutes, is a much more proper period for the delivery of a sermon, and quite sufficiently long on ordinary occasions. Of the topics that offer themselves on every subject, he who has acquired the art of selecting the most suitable, and of compressing his thoughts on those topics in as few words as is consistent with perspicuity, will be able to say as much in thirty-five minutes as will be sufficient for all the purposes of edification, and as any ordinary hearer can retain and digest.

The *delivery* of a discourse is scarcely a less important matter than its composition:—to this point we would therefore invite the attention of the young preacher. And, in the first place, let him endeavour to acquire a neat and perspicuous style, equally removed from clownish coarseness and tinsel glitter. Let not the desire of applause tempt him to employ hard and unusual words and phrases—for this will make him contemptible to the wise, and unintelligible to the ignorant. Yet equal care should be taken to avoid every thing low, vulgar, and provincial, both in the words and figures of speech that are employed. The principal object of a public speaker is to make himself clearly understood; and to this end, he should express himself in such language, as will clearly exhibit his meaning—such language as is intelligible to every person of common sense who hears him. Useless words should be avoided. If all unnecessary words were discarded, many a sermon which now occupies an hour in its delivery, might be delivered in half an hour, without the omission of a single valuable idea.

A speaker ought to be acquainted with the exact meaning of all the words he uses, and give them their correct pronunciation. The authorized pronunciation of Scripture proper names is necessary to be known:—without this a man is unfit to read many parts of the Bible in public.

The articulation should be distinct and deliberate. Every word and every syllable must have a clear and full pronunciation. Rapid speaking is a com-

mon fault of young beginners, arising in part from the agitation inseparable from first attempts ; but this frequently through neglect, acquires the stubbornness of habit, and it is a habit very difficult to conquer, and extremely pernicious and inconvenient. A rapid delivery is peculiarly unsuitable to the solemnity of the pulpit, and in all cases it is destructive of the grace and pathos of eloquence ; besides rendering speaking exceedingly laborious, and hearing comparatively useless. Those who are as yet free from this habit, should be upon their guard against its approach ; and they who have unhappily contracted it, should endeavour to conquer it by pronouncing their discourses to themselves much slower than they need to do in the pulpit ; by this means they will accustom themselves to the proper time.

Care should be taken to avoid all whining, singing, or affected tones.—The tones we use in ordinary earnest conversation, are those with which we ought to preach. It is important to a speaker to pitch his voice on the proper key, neither too high nor too low. Vociferation, accompanied with striking the pulpit or the Bible, is used by some preachers to enforce their appeals, and sometimes even *to strengthen their arguments!* We have heard preachers speak to a few persons in a small chapel, with a voice that might have been heard by ten thousand people, and which was, of course, quite distracting. The other extreme is equally reprehensible. In general, the voice may be so managed, that they who are the furthestmost off

may be within hearing, while those who are near are not stunned. If the voice be weak, it should have the benefit of a clear and deliberate articulation; for it is truly surprising how much this will compensate for the want of vocal strength.

Young preachers should be aware of contracting awkward gesticulations. A forward inclination of the body to denote earnestness, with a gentle motion of the right hand, such as any one would use in earnest conversation, are all that are necessary. In general, too little is better than too much; and none at all is preferable to that which is ungracefully managed. Violent jestures, such as clapping the hands and striking the pulpit, &c., are unseemly in a preacher of the Gospel.

Finally—Let all young preachers be careful to abstain from whatever bears the semblance of affectation in learning, eloquence, or authority; for of all the other faults in delivery, this is the most disgusting and unpardonable.

CHAPTER VIII.

Influence of Piety on Ministerial Studies and Labours.

IT is not the least of the numerous benefits which religion confers upon its possessor, that it enables him to discharge the common duties of life with more ease and vigour, and often even with more ability than he otherwise could do. This it does chiefly by its moral influence. It inspires the mind with activity and patience, with firmness and self possession, with serenity and peace. Looking to the authority and approbation of the Deity, and to the future recompence of reward, he is thence supplied with a constant stimulus to honourable activity—a stimulus to which the ungodly are strangers; and which is often vigorous and efficient when other motives are feeble or entirely suspended.

But it is not by its moral influence alone that piety aids in the performance of secular duties; for it elevates and expands the intellect itself, by familiarizing it with dignified objects, and rendering it conversant with the sublimest truths—truths which relate to the Supreme Being, and the eternal interests of man.

But if religion is felt to be so happily influential in the discharge of ordinary duties, much more direct and perceptible must be its influence on the performance of the sacred duties of the Ministry. Here, moral influence is essential : the state of the heart is a consideration of prime importance. Humility and circumspection, patient industry, manly self-possession, and disinterested love, are demanded in their highest exercise. What is to sustain these virtues in a Christian Minister ? Can any worldly considerations—the prospect of gain, of carnal pleasure, of fame ? These are never held out as his rewards : to him they are unhallowed and forbidden prizes ; and to a lay minister they are usually inaccessible also. It is most evident, then, that nothing can fit him for his sacred vocation but piety ; the love of God shed abroad in his heart, producing love to all mankind ; the energy, humility, long suffering, and zeal, which spring from faith working by love, and the hope of receiving, as his reward, the approbation of the judge of all the earth.

Already we have endeavoured to enforce the necessity of a sound conversion as an antecedent qualification for the ministry. The object now in view is, to exhibit the peculiar obligations of a christian divine, not only to stand fast in the grace he has received at his conversion, but “ *to grow in grace,*” “ *to go on to perfection ;*” and to be as conspicuous in holiness, as he is in station and attainments.—We would point out the happy influence of deep and ardent piety on his studies and labours, and the

high advantages possessed by such a preacher, over one whose piety is cold and low.

That a preacher of the Gospel ought to be a person of eminent piety, is a position readily admitted by all descriptions of men ; hence it always happens that an immoral or lukewarm minister is universally despised—despised even by those who are total strangers to experimental religion themselves ; even these are shocked at the incongruous spectacle presented by a graceless preacher of the Gospel of Grace. Hence it is needless to take pains to prove that a preacher ought to have *some* religion ; we can demonstrate that his character and office require him to possess a large measure ; that he should not be satisfied with ordinary attainments, but as he ought to precede his people in knowledge and sound learning, so he ought to go before them in holiness, and be enabled to say to them, “ be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ.”

The enjoyment of the pardoning love of God, attested by the witness of the Holy Spirit, has already been exhibited as an indispensable qualification in those who assume the sacred office. To retain this distinguished blessing, with increasing clearness and stability, should be an object of deep solicitude to every Christian preacher. And this he can only do by the constant exercise of faith in the Atonement of the Son of God, as well as by conscientiously and earnestly endeavouring in all things to please God.

This clear consciousness of the Divine favour

is essential to his personal comfort, as well as to his public usefulness. It will fill his soul with light, strength, and peace, and enable him “to comfort others with that comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God.” But if the evidence of his acceptance with God be uncertain or variable, he will drag on heavily, miserably, and darkly. And on this all important point too, his public ministry will be defective :—he may be able to exhibit justification by faith with doctrinal clearness ; but he cannot press it upon his hearers with experimental warmth, or convince them that it is there common privilege, and may *non* be obtained.

A preacher of the Gospel ought assiduously to cultivate *Holy zeal*. A work which is extremely difficult and arduous, cannot be performed without determined and persevering efforts : such a work is that of preaching the Gospel ; which no one can believe consists merely in delivering a round of sermons. A minister must watch over the souls committed to his care, with parental affection and assiduity. He must therefore add private admonition to public instruction : the seed which he sows he must water by incessant prayer : the truths he inculcates from the pulpit, he must illustrate by a holy example. In a word, he must be “instant in season and out of season ;” he must “reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.”

Now, for such a work as this, how lamentably unfit is a lukewarm person, or one who is disposed to give himself as little trouble as he can in the performance of it ! That sacred zeal which is

the offspring of divine love, and which no difficulties or opposition can extinguish, is obviously indispensable here.

“ Could it be possible for a parent,” says Mr. Wesley, “ to go through the pain and fatigue of bearing and bringing up even one child, were it not for that vehement, inexpressible affection which his Creator has given him for this very end. How much less will it be possible for any pastor, any spiritual parent, to go through the pain and labour of travailing in birth for and bringing up many children to the measure of the full stature of Christ without a large measure of that inexpressible affection which a stranger intermeddleth not with.”

Deep humility should also be a conspicuous feature in his character. Humility is the disposition of mind proceeding from clear views of his former rebellion against God, and the imperfection of his present obedience—rebellion for which he might justly have been damned—obedience which can never entitle him to eternal life : this consideration strikes at the root of pride. And if he cannot value himself on moral grounds, still less will he be disposed to pride himself in personal or mental accomplishments. Sober in the comparative estimate of his attainments, he dare not vaunt himself on the most decided superiority ; well aware that the original capacity was intrusted to him by his Creator, as well as the disposition and the opportunity to improve and exercise it ; and that no talents are estimable in the sight of God, except so far as they are connected with purity of intention in their exercise.

He who is under the influence of these views, will not be chagrined at the want of applause, but will rather be disposed to be ashamed at being applauded at all.

Popular applause he indeed rates much below its current value ; he esteems it so far as it contributes to his influence, and consequently his power of doing good ; but on any other grounds it is beneath the notice of a truly humble person. He despises it as a paltry bauble, often bestowed upon false but showy excellence, and seldom the reward of solid worth. True humility exemplifies the Apostolical precept—"Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." It shuns no employment, and no society that Christian decorum does not disallow.

Vanity in a minister, besides its monstrous inconsistency, is a source of unspeakable inquietude. The thirst for applause has in it all the turbulence of a fever ; the gratification of its wishes creates a disorderly feeling like intoxication ; and disappointment is perfect misery. On the other hand, the advantages of unfeigned humility are unspeakable, not only on account of the lustre it gives to his character, but because it so essentially contributes to his peace of mind. His public labours will be subject to idle, invidious, or contemptuous criticisms. Sometimes his sermons will be extolled beyond their merits ; but oftener depreciated below them. Ignorant men will sometimes injudiciously applaud him to his face, and often circulate blundering strictures on his imagined improprieties

and errors. He will have to pass through evil report and good report ; but, armed with meekness and humility, he will pursue the even tenor of his way, “ rejoicing in the testimony of his conscience that with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he has his conversation in the world.”

Deadness to the world has ever been a peculiar badge of true Christians, and therefore should especially distinguish a public teacher of Christianity. The leading and ultimate object of all his preaching is, to persuade his hearers “ to set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth ; to break the spell which binds men to the earth, by exhibiting the vanity of its pleasures, and the shortness and uncertainty of life : to contrast with his brief, unstable, and disturbed abode on earth, the grandeur of his immortality, and his mighty interests in the future state. Certainly then, a person who undertakes to do this, should indicate in his whole deportment, a complete superiority to the world. He would be a wretched general who should order his men to meet the enemy in the field, and yet himself remain sporting or gambling in his tent ; but much more wretchedly inconsistent is that preacher who, while he beseeches others as strangers and pilgrims to abstain from fleshly lusts, betrays himself glaring symptoms of carnality and earthly mindedness.

If a minister would successfully lead the souls committed to his care, against those “ fleshly lusts” and that worldly cupidity “ which war against the

soul," he must lead the way and beckon to them from a position much in advance of themselves.— Vainly will he exhort them to "arise and depart for this is not their rest," -if he set them not the example, but evince, by his conduct, that he is satisfied with earthly good, and is not seeking for "the rest which remaineth for the people of God." This is a point of more than ordinary importance. Excessive love of the world is the most formidable evil which religion has to struggle with in the soul of man. Indeed it is an evil of which all others may be said to be but modifications, and the example of a preacher, at all times of deep importance, on this point, seems to be more attentively regarded, and to be more influential, especially on the mischievous side than on any other.

Meekness, candour, and kindness, should beautify the deportment of a christian minister. These amiable tempers will contribute largely to his personal comfort, and not less so to the comfort of all with whom he has any intercourse. For this latter reason they are more cordially admired by the men of the world, than most other virtues, and are often successful in opening the bars of prejudice, the avenues of conviction, and even the affections themselves, which to men of forbidding manners would be inaccessible.

Care must however be taken to unite with these gentle virtues, that moral courage which will not shrink from the avowal and support of disagreeable truths. Such a combination of opposite qualities can only be effected by a large effusion of the Holy Spirit.

As men of business, local preachers ought to be scrupulously upright. Equity, truth, and simplicity should mark all their commercial transactions. All selfishness and duplicity, boasting and backbiting, rudeness and frivolity of conversation, they should abhor as utterly "unseemly." They must "abstain from every *appearance* of evil." And to sum up all in the comprehensive language of Paul to Timothy, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach: Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity. (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God.) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." The external deportment of a minister is very narrowly scrutinized by the world, which, like the fly, always fixes upon sores, rather than sound places. One unprincipled or even indiscreet action, would injure not only his own character and usefulness, but the credit of the community, and the cause generally to which he is attached. A local preacher, unsupported by the dignity of office, or the splendour of talents and learning, may nevertheless have the authority of innocence: and this is an authority which seldom fails to command respect—and that

respect of all others the most desirable, the homage of the heart.

The Apostle Paul after recommending to the Ephesians a variety of Christian graces, to which he figuratively applies the names of several descriptions of armour, concludes with these remarkable words—"praying always with all prayer, and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints."—With this same injunction we would conclude the view we have taken of the Christian excellence of a preacher of the Gospel. We have called the passage just quoted a remarkable one, not that we might not have expected him to enjoin the duty of prayer in this place, but partly because of the singular and sudden departure from the tropical style in which he had been describing other christian virtues, a circumstance which strongly marks his deep conviction of the vast and superior importance of prayer; his anxiety to recommend the duty seemed not to leave him at leisure to speak figuratively, and the language he uses, indicates the utmost solicitude and earnestness. Perhaps the Apostle was aware that no article of armour either offensive or defensive could properly represent prayer; and yet he well knew that prayer is necessary to enable the christian soldier successfully to wield every part of his spiritual armour. But no language either plain or figurative can adequately express the value of prayer. Dr. Young has made a vigorous effort in the following exquisite lines:—

“Prayer ardent opens heaven, and lets down
A stream of glory on the consecrated hour
Of Man in audience with the Deity.”

A minister of the Gospel ought to be a man of ardent and ceaseless prayer; for it is only by the instrumentality of this duty that he can obtain, hold fast, and increase in all inward and outward holiness.—Prayer is an admirable preparation for study; the very exercise seems to brace, fix, and animate the mind; and it engages the secret influences of the Divine Spirit, by which light is communicated to the understanding, energy to the will, and unction to the feelings.

And lastly, without prayer success in preaching cannot rationally be expected, for “Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but it is God that giveth the increase:” and God does not, in ordinary cases, give that “increase” except in answer to prayer. All experience verifies this remark. Very successful preachers are not always men of eminent talents, but they are invariably men of mighty prayer.

Those that pray much for the success of their ministry, at once confess their own insufficiency, and acknowledge that all the good that is done on the earth, the Lord himself doeth it. Such God will honour by making them successful in their labours. For “them that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” A prayerless evangelist will be “known by his fruits,” or rather by his *want* of fruits: such a person will always be punished by an apparently barren ministry. We say *apparently*, because God

will sometimes honour his truth when he disapproves of the instrument of its communication, yet his usefulness will rarely be visible or known to himself.

Having thus briefly stated what, all must believe, ought to be the religious experience and practice of a preacher of the Gospel, or what the piety and purity that should imbue his heart and rule his conduct, we proceed to advert more particularly to the happy influence of such decided piety on the performance and success of his ministerial work.—Much of what may be advanced, has been in part anticipated; but on a subject so vitally important, repetitions may not be thought unpardonable.

First of all—lively personal piety will render essential aid in theological study, and especially in the composition of sermons.

It is an obvious truth, that no study can be successfully prosecuted that is prosecuted *heartlessly*; and this must invariably be the case when it is uncongenial to the taste, or viewed as unimportant. An object that is disliked, or not expected to reward pursuit, cannot possibly be pursued with that persevering vigour which is indispensable to success.—Now the theological studies of a lukewarm or carnal preacher must necessarily be heartless, except so far as he is animated by the “strange fire” of vain ambition. No work can possibly be more uninteresting or disagreeable to such a character than the composition of sermons: it will bring his mind in contact with subjects not only

foreign to his taste, but utterly adverse to it. He will not only disrelish his task for its own sake ;— but he will be uninspired by the desire or the hope of doing good ; for it is inconceivable that an unconverted man should sincerely desire the conversion of others. Languid then, and painful must be his efforts. His understanding will be slow to comprehend, and his memory feeble to retain truths which to him have no attractions. Want of experience and want of energy will render his sermons barren, defective, and powerless.

On the other hand, the advantages under which a preacher pursues his studies whose soul is alive to God, are almost too great and manifold to be described. Piety will give to his efforts all the stability of conviction, and all the liveliness of feeling : it will induce him to attach to his labours a due value. Even the humble studies of an occasional preacher he cannot regard as unimportant : they are of consequence to himself ; for though his talent be small, yet the reward of its faithful improvement will be infinite ; they are of consequence to those amongst whom he labours, whose character and eternal destiny they may deeply effect. Above all, the consideration that God has condescended to employ him as an honoured instrument in advancing his own cause and glory, will impart to his reading and meditation, a character of solemnity and importance which will forbid him to pursue them with lukewarmness.

A deeply pious preacher loves study for its own

sake ; because the subjects which engage his attention are congenial to his renovated taste ; they interest and delight him ; and when the heart is thus in the work, all the faculties of the mind seem to perform their functions with promptitude and vigour ; the dryest study is refreshing, the most laborious easy to the soul that is warmed and expanded by divine love.

Furthermore, experimental piety will aid the studies of a preacher, not by its *moral* influence solely—it will furnish him with the invaluable assistance of experience, which will delightfully illustrate and verify all experimental subjects, and enable him to speak on them with a perspicuity and confidence which the greatest human learning cannot supply. Above all, a pious minister will enjoy the direct teaching of the Holy Spirit, who “layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous,” and “will guide the meek in judgment.”

The discourses of such a preacher will be very observably distinguished from the effusions of unsanctified study. They may not display the research of erudition, nor the refinements of eloquence ; but they will exhibit truth in its beautiful simplicity and commanding force ; his words will tell with the liveliness of reality and the warmth of conviction. Others may embellish their representations with more gorgeous colours ; but in his there will be those natural and expressive touches which, in a picture, at once convinces us it has had an original, and gives us a distinct impression of his exact likeness.

As piety is most happily influential in the composition of sermons, so it is not less so in their delivery. Self possession, animation, gravity, and modesty, are qualities of indispensable importance in all kinds of public speaking; and they are all the natural results of piety.

In the first place, religion is highly favourable to courage and self-possession. Nothing is so tormenting and injurious to a public speaker, as excessive diffidence; it generally confuses thought and always ruins delivery. He who is under its influence, labours under a disadvantage similar to that of an artist who is paralyzed in his hands.

“No cause,” it has been observed, “more frequently produces bashfulness in a public speaker, than too high an opinion of his own importance. He that imagines an assembly filled with his merits, panting with expectation, and hushed with attention, easily terrifies himself with the dread of disappointing them, and strains his imagination in pursuit of something that may support the veracity of fame, and shew that his reputation was not gained by chance. He considers that what he shall say or do, will never be forgotten, that renown or infamy is suspended on every syllable, and that nothing ought to fall from him which would not bear the test of time. Under such solicitude, who can wonder that the mind is overwhelmed, and by struggling with attempts above her strength, quickly sinks into langour and despondency.”

But deep piety effectually cures this foolish vani-

ty, by teaching us to "think soberly" of our talents, and by diminishing not only our expectation of applause, but even our *desire* for it. A pious man has not indeed learned to be wholly indifferent to public opinion; but he has learned to form such a very moderate estimate of it as relieves him from all disquietude about it. The supreme desire that religion fixes in his soul, to glorify God, and faithfully discharge his duty, supplies him with sufficient motives to exertion, while it neutralizes all that is pernicious in the desire for success or the dread of failure.

Timidity may arise from distrust of one's abilities as well as from too high a valuation of them; but for this religion provides a specific remedy in the confidence which it enables him to repose in God as his helper. God has given special promises of assistance to his servants in the discharge of their public duties. "Lo I am with you alway to the end of the world." *I am with you!* How pregnant with meaning is this declaration! If thou, O Christ, art with me, the faithful minister may say, then I can want nothing; I shall have thy wisdom, thy power, and thy truth; and I can do all things if thou strengthenest me.

Give me thy strength O God of power;
Then let winds blow or thunders roar,
Thy faithful witness will I be;
'Tis fix'd; I can do all through Thee!

Firm confidence in God imparts delightful tranquillity and courage to the mind; and great must

be the advantage of a person possessed of it, over the man who can have no expectation of Divine assistance ; and who must therefore depend entirely upon his own resources. We are not ignorant that timidity is, in most cases, to a certain extent a natural defect of the constitution. It may arise from nervous debility, early habits, or a certain morbid sensibility which cannot be well explained. Now as holiness exerts no direct influence on the physical frame, it provides no certain cure for this kind of fear ; still it will greatly counteract and mitigate it by its moral influence, and in indirect ways. It is often seen that some very stirring and momentous affair of a worldly nature, will produce such an excitement in very timid people, as completely to overbear their fears, and enable them to act on the occasion with great boldness and decision. It is in this manner that religion neutralizes the influence of animal timidity, by the impulse of Divine love, and the elevating and exciting views of eternal realities which it presents. And this effect of religion is not momentary and fitful, but constant and steady ; and its strength entirely depending upon the vigour of his piety, may be increased to any amount.

Animation is justly esteemed a capital and essential property of elocution ; unhappily it is a property in which many excellent preachers are deficient : some of whom, to use the language of the *Spectator*, “ stand stock still in the pulpit, and will not stir a finger to set off the best sermon in the

world ; and who can talk of life and death in cold blood, and keep their temper in a discourse which turns upon every thing that is dear to them and their hearers."

Now it is difficult for a speaker to be energetic, except he be in earnest ; and it is impossible for him to be in earnest unless he believe the truth and feel the importance of what he delivers. Ardent piety must, therefore, be the proper source of animation in a preacher. He alone whose soul is alive to God, can feel as he ought on spiritual subjects. He only will be deeply impressed with their solemn reality and mighty consequence : fully aware of the awful condition of sinners, and the manifold dangers and conflicts of believers, he will address them from the abundance of his heart ; and if his arguments be logically defective, his hearers will perceive that he speaks from conviction. If they cannot be moved by the *letter* of his persuasions, they will discern in them the spirit of ardent desire for their conversion ; and this will rarely fail of producing a salutary effect. Animation in a preacher, when it is evidently the offspring of unfeigned love, generally communicates itself in some degree to the hearer.

But from what source can an unconverted man derive energy ? How can he be animated, who is unmoved by his own persuasions, and unconvinced by his own arguments ? Whose exhortations with sinners are delivered without compassion for their misery ; whose cautions to the unwary are

given without solicitude for their safety ; and whose instructions to all are communicated, if not with sceptical, yet with *heartless* indifference, both as to the value of truth and the reception it receives from his hearers ! How, again, can he *pathetically* exhibit the malignity of sin and the horrors of damnation, who abhors not the one nor dreads the other ? How can he warmly depict the beauty of holiness, who views it as something undesirable ; or the felicity of heaven, who relishes none but carnal, or merely intellectual, pleasures ? How, in a word, can he be animated, *who is not in earnest* ?

Genuine piety will repress lightness and unseemly humour in the pulpit ; it will give to a preacher's whole manner, both with regard to language, tones, gesture, and command of countenance, a sacred and dignified gravity. Speakers on other occasions may sometimes be playful and humourous to some advantage ; but it has been noticed, that those who are remarkable for these qualities, though they may be very popular and pleasing orators, are not often very successful in producing that which is the main end of all public speaking to produce—conviction. The understanding of rational people can only be convinced by sound argument, delivered with a seriousness which indicates that the speaker himself feels their force. Arguments, however good, lose much of their weight when set forth in a giddy, frothy manner. For if a speaker, by his manner, seem to make light of his own discourse, it can hardly be expected that listeners will treat it with suitable respect.

But there is no department of public speaking where gravity is so indispensable as in that of preaching. Elsewhere, lightness may be inexpedient and useless; *here* it is sinful and mischievous. The deep solemnity of a preacher's situation;—an ambassador from an offended God treating with rebellious sinners: the infinite importance of the object at which he aims; the eternal salvation of souls;—absolutely forbid every thing of the kind.

“ 'Tis pitiful to court a grin,
When you should woo a soul.”

Nevertheless the gravity of a preacher should not be the gloom of melancholy, or the sternness of pride and ill nature; it must be such a gravity only as will combine with the cheerfulness of the christian, the joyful alacrity of a messenger of glad tidings.

Simplicity, which is the reverse of affectation, and *modesty*, which is opposed to improper self-confidence, are dispositions invariably flowing from divine love, and they will therefore, invariably grace the wisdom and soften the boldness of a deeply pious preacher. And there is no description of hearers, however singular their tastes, but have a taste for these amiable qualities. Modesty and simplicity, if combined with humble abilities, will procure for them all the respect, and often *more* than the respect to which they are fairly entitled, while to great talents they add a most fascinating charm.

The exercise of public prayer is a difficult and responsible part of a minister's duty ; and in the performance of this duty, nothing yields such essential aid as deep piety. This point, though very important, we shall pass briefly over, intending to make it the subject of a separate chapter. In passing, it may be remarked, that public extempore prayer, to a person who is not deeply devoted to God, can rarely be performed with satisfaction or profit, either to himself or others ; to such a person it is usually a task both difficult and disagreeable ; but he who loves prayer for its own sake, as every pious person must do, will generally perform it with ease and pleasure, because it is natural to him, it is his proper element, and therefore delightful.

Prayer is a field in which a holy man can range with confidence, because it is ground which he daily and hourly treads. His mind will not be benumbed with coldness and lethargy, or scared with guilt, in approaching the Almighty ; but he will feel and display the ease and confidence with which a person approaches to or converses with one, with whom, though much his superior, he is nevertheless on friendly and familiar terms.

The success of the ministry in the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers, depends, we might say *essentially*, on the personal piety of ministers. Men of small talents are often honoured by the Supreme Head of the Church as instruments of extensive good ; and for this somewhat remarkable procedure, a special reason is assigned ; —it is, not to discourage the pursuit of wisdom and

the cultivation of the talents ; but to counteract the propensity so universal and so inveterate in man, of losing sight of the Divine Agency in his admiration of human talents ; or in other words, “ that the excellency of the power may be ” clearly seen to be “ of God and not of man, and that no flesh may glory in his presence.” But it greatly deserves notice, that men of *little grace* are never thus honoured : those preachers who are rendered eminently and conspicuously useful, whether their talents are humble or eminent, are *always* distinguished for deep piety.

All experience testifies the general inutility of the preaching of unconverted persons, or of those who are lukewarm and half-hearted ; and on several accounts this is altogether to be expected. If we look at qualification simply, and without reference to Divine influence, an unconverted person is obviously unqualified to preach with success. If indeed his business were merely to proselyte men from one opinion to another, unsanctified learning might be sufficient ; but it is far more than this ;—it is to persuade them to alter the whole course of their lives : to “ set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth : ” to work in them an effectual conviction, that if they “ live after the flesh, they will die ; but if through the Spirit they mortify the deeds of the body they shall live.” This mighty change in the human soul, we are aware, can only be accomplished by the energy of the Holy Spirit ; but a graceless person is an unsuitable instrument by which to communicate that

energy. For how can he persuade men who know not the terrors of the Lord ! How can he vehemently urge sinners to embrace religion, by all that is hateful in sin, horrible in perdition, glorious in holiness, or transcendent in celestial happiness, — whose mind to all these objects is wholly dead ! How can he affect the hearts of others by exhibiting the unparalleled love of God in Christ to the guilty world, who is unaffected by that love himself !

Again ; the sermons of an unconverted preacher will be destitute of the authority which the reputation of heartfelt and unblemished piety can only confer. In spite of our efforts, we listen to such a preacher with a suspicion and disgust which too effectually wars against our edification : and our disgust rises in proportion to his affectation of zeal. But when we hear a preacher, who we are assured, believes all the truth he teaches, practices all the duties he enjoins, and experiences all the blessings he promises ; we listen with respectful attention. If we cannot admire his talents, we venerate his purity and consistency ; and that veneration originates a feeling not easily to be described, but which is altogether favourable to our reception of spiritual profit. We are irresistibly impelled to attach importance to what he advances ; we are inclined to honour the message for the sake of the messenger.

But the grand reason why an unsanctified preacher is unsuccessful, is the want of divine influence accompanying his preaching ; and this being

wanted, the noblest talents are exerted in vain. And they only who carry the Spirit in their hearts into the pulpit, can expect him to “ help their infirmities, and apply the word preached with power and much assurance.”

But the pulpit is not the only place in which a local preacher may be useful. In the fulfilment of his Sabbath appointments, he will be introduced to various families and individuals, whom he may edify by spiritual conversation and christian simplicity of manners. But here superior piety is peculiarly needed : good sense, extensive information, and an agreeable address, have each of them a great and specific value, as companionable qualifications, but *great grace* is necessary to make them instrumental to spiritual profit : and if possible, more grace is required here than in the pulpit ; for it is unquestionable that there is more hypocrisy and mere specious semblance of godliness displayed in the pulpit than any where else ; from which it would appear that it is less difficult to play the hypocrite here than elsewhere. Too many preachers, as well as hearers, after displaying the most commendable zeal, and the most elevated spirituality in the house of God, unhappily leave *their sanctity* there, and can only be denominated mere triflers in private company.

The deportment of a minister in the families he may visit, may be productive of very happy or very evil consequences. In such families there will often be children and young servants ; and these will usually pay far more regard to, and be more

easily affected with his spirit and conversation amongst them than with his public discourses. Local preachers are, however, in danger of overlooking this matter from the idea, that being secular characters, they are not regarded with that respect which is necessary to render their deportment very noticeable or influential, and also that the visits they make in the capacity of ministers, are too brief and occasional to admit of being turned to any momentous account. But these notions are both mischievous and false ; they betray great ignorance of the nature of human influence, which is often communicated by simple means, and in the compass of a few moments. The minds of children are highly susceptible. The incidental display of amiable tempers ; the offering up of a fervent prayer ; a few words of kind advice or exhortation ; a judicious remark, or a serious look ; may, by the blessing of God, fix an indelible impression on their hearts.

Now the preacher who is truly alive to God, and thirsting for the spiritual good of his fellow-creatures, and aware of the important consequences that may result from his private conduct, will not be serious in the pulpit, and trifling in the parlour ; he will not *there* exhort his hearers to avoid “ foolish talking and jesting ;” and *here* talk foolishly and jestingly himself. He dare not plunge into worldly conversation, much less slanderous and backbiting conversation, immediately after he has been warning his hearers against these evils. Such conduct, unhappily too common, would degrade both his character and his office, and might lead the

young and unconverted to imbibe very unhappy impressions respecting religion.

But he is a *local preacher*, it is said, and on ordinary days a man of business, and his visits are short and seldom. True : but notwithstanding this, his social visits, short and seldom as they are, need not be useless. He may be the same character in the house as in the pulpit; he may evince that easy gravity, sober cheerfulness, courteous carriage, and unaffected modesty, which deep piety, joined with good sense, invariably teaches. He may avoid foolish talking and jesting, worldly conversation, and above all, he may abstain from that reproach to society, evil speaking; he may seize every opportunity of turning the conversation into a religious and instructive channel, and of drawing the attention of his friends to the beauty and happiness of personal piety. He may speak kindly to children, and give them good advice; and tell them how Jesus loves them, and desires to save them; and finally, he may make it a point of conscience to solicit the blessing of Heaven upon the family on his departure, whenever he has an opportunity. All this, even a local preacher may do, and he may do it in the compass of a short visit. And if he be a man of genuine piety, all this he will do. To a half-hearted person, such a mode of conduct may appear vastly difficult, and will indeed to such a character be morally impossible; but to one who unites intelligence with deep piety, it will be natural, easy, and delightful.

CHAPTER IX.

The gift of Prayer.

THE gift of public prayer is by no means the least important qualification of a christian minister. Prayer is an essential part of public worship. It is also the most important part, both on account of its peculiar sacredness, as addressed immediately to God ; and likewise on account of its influence on the religious feelings of the worshippers. He therefore who conducts the devotional part of public worship, or is the mouth of the people in their approaches to the Most High, is in a deeply responsible situation ; he ought not only to possess unquestioned piety, but considerable talent.

These observations, it is evident, must exclusively refer to extempore prayer, or prayer offered up without the aid of written forms. We are not ignorant that weighty arguments may be adduced in behalf of the use of forms of prayer ; nor is it denied that this mode of praying has in some respects peculiar advantages ; and that, in certain cases, it is even preferable to extemporaneous effusions. Yet these are to be understood as but limited concessions. The comparative advantages of the two methods are, in our opinion, decidedly in favour of extemporary prayer. That a person may pray sincerely, and even earnestly, with the aid of a form,

it would be absurd to question ; at the same time the practice must necessarily expose him to the temptation of being lazy and inanimate in his devotions. On the contrary, it is scarcely possible for one to engage in extempore prayer without considerable effort and abstraction of mind. And turning, as he must do, to the contemplation of his state and his wants, his mind is naturally roused into warmth and activity. Forms may guard us against inaccuracies ; but a few verbal blunders are much less to be dreaded than that cold formality which the use of forms strongly tend to cherish : they furnish a fence by which we are prevented from straying out of the path of correct sentiment and phraseology ; but that very fence too often obstructs our intellectual vision, and intercepts the inspiration of the Divine Spirit.

Some people seem to think that prayer is a natural or supernatural endowment, and a *gift* in the strict sense. This in some cases is partly true ;—many unlettered men have a fluency and propriety in prayer, which we are assured they have not acquired by art and effort ; while others of far more enlarged and accurate minds discover great barrenness and embarrassment. “ The inspiration of the Almighty gives men understanding,” in prayer especially. Yet there is often “ a spirit in man,” the natural peculiarities of which accounts for this difference. Some men, for instance, are naturally clear and quick in their perceptions, and fluent in their utterance ; and when these qualities are combined with firmness of nerve, and excitability of

feeling, they must needs give the individual a vast advantage over one of a different complexion ; but in what degree soever the gift or faculty of extempore public prayer is indebted to natural or divine endowments, still it is in all cases susceptible of indefinite improvement by the use of suitable means.

Of these means, the first that we shall notice, because the first in importance is *the careful cherishing of the spirit of prayer*. The spirit of prayer implies a love for and delight in the duty. It is the sure result of the spirit of piety. Nothing can be well done that is done with reluctance and disgust. In the absence of an attractive influence, the mind sinks into torpor ; from that which is viewed with abhorrence, it naturally shrinks ; and hence arises coldness, sloth, and dissipation. But nothing is more distasteful to the carnal mind than prayer ; and therefore for the reasons already assigned, it is scarcely possible for a lukewarm or irreligious person to succeed in extempore prayer. Genius and study may enable a man to conceive and give utterance to good thoughts, and a preposterous vanity or a mere sentimental excitement, may supply him with some animation ; but a task which is heartless, is always laborious and unpleasant ; such prayers will be deficient in that ardour and unction which distinguish the prayers of the heart. The mind reverts with facility to those subjects with which it is at once highly pleased and deeply conversant ; for this reason ; a deeply pious person, or one who is in earnest pur-

suit of spiritual good, will neither have proper subjects or suitable language of prayer to seek, they will be at hand, and seem to present themselves of their own accord. The clear and often painful view of his sins and his wants, which will be ever present to his mind, will almost supersede study; it will suggest ample matter for prayer and confession, matter too which will generally bring with it a language of its own. He who enjoys habitual and friendly intercourse with God in secret, will be enabled to approach him in public with unshackled freedom and holy boldness. Prayer is his proper element; it will therefore be easy, because delightful. But to this freedom of access to God, the carnal or lukewarm soul must be wholly a stranger; unacquainted or unaffected with his spiritual necessities he will truly "know not what to pray for as he ought." The consciousness of guilt, if he have any conscience, will paralyze his mind. Carnal, and unused to devotional themes, he must experience the reluctance of aversion, and the embarrassment of inexperience.

A distinct and orderly view of the several parts of prayer, carefully preserved in the mind, will be found greatly to facilitate the gift of prayer. These are usually reckoned, adoration, thanksgivings, confession, supplication, and intercession. When we approach the Almighty in prayer, it is highly proper that our minds should be impressed with just sentiments relative to his exalted nature. Prayer should therefore generally commence with the mention of some of the Divine perfections, accompanied with suitable expressions of veneration

and ascriptions of praise : this is adoration ; and to draw near to God without some such modest introduction, is inconsistent with that reverence for the Deity which must ever be the most prominent feature of devotion. Thanksgiving for favours received seems most reasonably to claim the next place. This may be general or circumstantial as the occasion may require or the time allow. Next must follow humble confession of sin, to which the same remarks will apply. Then supplication for pardon, and for whatsoever grace or blessing ourselves and the congregation may appear particularly to need. Lastly, intercession should invariably occupy a place in public prayer. We should intercede with God for the peace and prosperity of the church, for our king and country, for the conversion of sinners, particularly those to whom we are allied, either by the bonds of friendship or blood. As the order in which these subjects are here mentioned, appears to be the most natural, it would be well, in most cases, to follow it, and this would tend very materially to obviate confusion and embarrassment.—These remarks are only intended to be *generally* applicable ; no invariable rule, it is evident, can be prescribed. Public prayer should be adapted to existing circumstances. There will generally be some thing peculiar in the posture of public affairs, the state of the church, and in the circumstances of the congregation or family in which we officiate, that will call for special notice ; passing events too of moral bearing, such as cases of sudden death, afflictive calamity, actual or

threatened, and merciful deliverance, are capable of similar improvement. A discourse just delivered, or a portion of scripture read, will also suggest matter for prayer. Such an adaptation to occasions is one of the peculiar advantages of extempore prayer. And it is a matter which ought by no means to be neglected. It may at first be found difficult, as it requires considerable forethought and presence of mind ; but close attention, and persevering practice, will render it easy. In order to pray with freedom, the attention should be withdrawn as much as possible from surrounding objects, every wandering thought should be resolutely recalled, and the mind exclusively fixed on the subjects in which you are engaged.

The gift of prayer may be improved by carefully studying the devotional parts of Scripture, and particularly the Psalms ; in which would be found devout sentiments embodied in language the most strikingly appropriate, and unaffectedly sublime. It would be highly useful to have the memory stored with these passages ; they would not only suggest matter, but often also furnish language far more suitable and impressive than any we could invent. Valuable assistance of the same sort may also be obtained by the study of forms or models of prayer of human composition, as well as by attending to the matter and manner of those whom we may hear, who are eminently endowed with the gift of prayer. Hints for improvement of this sort will frequently fall in the way of those who are in the constant look out for them ; and such persons

will never despise or neglect such hints, or think it improper to adopt the thoughts and expressions of others that are strikingly appropriate. And this any person of common ingenuity may do without being chargeable with plagiarism or obvious imitation.

The ability to pray in public will depend materially, if not essentially, on our manner of praying in private. If our private prayers are habitually meagre, loose, and desultory, it is improbable that our public ones should be rich in matter, or methodical in arrangement. If barrenness and irregularity characterize our private devotions, the same faults will mark our devotions in public. To avoid this, every person who exercises publicly should accustom himself to pray in private with as much propriety of language and sentiment as if he were heard by a multitude. And to this end, the state of his mind and his peculiar circumstances and wants as well as those of others, should be the subject of serious pre-consideration. Perseverance in this practice would speedily discipline the mind to a desirable order and readiness, and prove an effectual antidote to embarrassment and confusion. The majesty of the Being whom we address, demands this attention; our own edification no less so; and it is perhaps impossible to acquire a profitable gift in prayer without it.

Some may deem such attention to form and regularity in the closet unfavourable to spirituality; and tending to coldness and formality. But even allowing the existence of this danger, we affirm

there is far greater danger in the opposite direction. Indifference to the manner is far more likely to generate carelessness than attention to it to produce coldness.

Plainness and simplicity should invariably characterize the language of devotion. Nothing is more unbecoming, or even preposterous than the use of uncommon words and pompous diction in prayer. It has far too much the appearance of aiming to secure the applause of those who hear us; and this, which is at all times a despicable motive, is shocking on an occasion when the mind ought to be absorbed with a sense of the Divine Majesty, and of its own guilt and necessities: the natural vanity of the human mind never discovers itself in so glaring and odious a light, as in persons who are seeking the applause of those whose earnest supplications and penitential acknowledgments they are at the same time professing to offer up to God.—Nothing can be more alien from that deep humiliation of spirit which becomes sinners at the footstool of Divine Mercy. And surely it must be an abomination in the sight of God to behold persons placed in the posture and uttering the language of penitence and prayer, inwardly elated with their elegant diction, and striving to produce admiration for their performance in the hearers rather than feelings of self-abasement and devotion.

Besides, the use of uncommon language inflicts a grievous injury on the ignorant part of the worshippers who, not comprehending the meaning of many of the words used, are, of course, bewild-

ered and unedified. The prayers recorded in Scripture, and in particular the Lord's Prayer, though always comprehensive and dignified, are strikingly simple in expression, and generally concise.

The language and the tones of prayer should be indicative of profound respect and reverence. The mention of this rule may seem superfluous ; yet we have not unfrequently heard it violated. The names of the Deity are sometimes pronounced with a lightsome boldness by no means suitable to his ineffable majesty. Some persons address the Almighty in the language of fondling endearment, or impertinent familiarity, as if they were speaking to one not quite their equal ; while the hectoring and obstreperous tones of others, if used to a superior fellow-mortal, would be considered intolerably insulting. This last fault, if it merit so soft a name, is most generally committed by a class of men, who place noise among the essentials of religion, and who are commonly more remarkable for zeal, than candour and circumspection. All these evils may be, and doubtless often are, the result of ignorance or inadvertence ; but by all they should be carefully shunned.

We are by no means partial to vociferation in prayer, because it is unsanctioned either by common sense or scriptural examples : for while it is but a dubious expression of earnestness ; it is in no wise expressive of that awful reverence with which sinful and helpless creatures should approach the Divine Majesty.

But those who are anxious to avoid boisterous

tones in their petitions, should take care not to be languid and inaudible ; these are qualities too nearly allied to deadness and formality. The feeling of devotion, when in its proper state, is a strong feeling and naturally expresses itself in animated tones : such tones are, therefore, best adapted to excite and maintain it. For every one knows how much the mind is affected even by sound. After all, we may assert, that the most intense devotion is sometimes compatible with perfect silence, or with the softest language ; but bawling and screaming are only befitting the worshippers of Baal.

Public prayers should be pointed and comprehensive ; and this will permit them to be concise. Long prayers generally arise from that imbecility or confusion of thought which cannot reach the point aimed at, and which therefore spends itself in vain repetitions, or useless verbiage. This is the principal reason why long prayers are so much and so justly disapproved. But tediousness in public prayer should be avoided for its own sake ; for unless in cases of peculiar divine influence, it is generally felt to be unprofitable.

The gift of prayer is highly desirable to a minister on several accounts ;—it will make the discharge of that solemn and important duty agreeable and edifying, both to himself and others ; and will, besides, have the effect of inducing that recollection and self command, which will fit him for the delivery of his sermon. Embarrassment in public prayer is extremely painful ; and the hearers—to their often serious loss of spiritual profit, generally

participate in the uncomfortable feeling. Besides, when a man is straitened in prayer, he seldom enjoys freedom in preaching ; that just confidence in himself, so essential to the ease and power of extempore delivery is impaired, while every thing that is hostile to it is generated, namely—timidity, dejection, and agitation.

But the assiduous and persevering use of the means we have recommended for the improvement of this important talent, will rarely fail of being successful ; and at the same time, the care thus exercised, will prove a salutary discipline of the mental faculties, and improve the qualifications for all kinds of extemporary speaking.

Finally—Let it be remembered, that the *heart* is the principal thing to be guarded in prayer ; whatever importance we may attach to the manner, and how much so ever it becomes us to avoid faults, and to acquire ability in our manner of praying ; still, humility, faith, earnestness, and sincerity, are, in the sight of God, the only essential properties of right prayer—“ Unto that man will I look that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word !”

CHAPTER X.

Punctuality in attending Appointments.

PUNCTUALITY in attending appointments, is one of the peculiar virtues of local preachers ; and it is a virtue of considerable excellence, although it does not always receive that consideration which it merits.

Many persons are more disposed to condemn remissness in this particular as a crime, than to award to fidelity the praise of virtue. One instance of omission they would loudly censure ; but perhaps the offending individual might long enough fulfil his appointments without hearing from them an expression of gratitude, or a word of commendation. But this is a disposition both ungrateful and unjust, and cannot be entertained except by those who are ignorant or regardless of the peculiar difficulties which often attend this part of a local preacher's duty. Let such a person then imagine, that after a week of fatiguing labour, a preacher has an appointment on the Sabbath six or eight miles distant ; this journey he has to perform on foot, on bad roads, and perhaps in bad weather : probably he has little time to spend with his own family on

other days, and on the Sabbath, while others enjoy themselves at home, he leaves his altogether. Perhaps also he prosecutes the journey under the pressure of bodily weakness or indisposition, or under the still more wasting influence of domestic cares and trials. To crown all, he may labour under a distressing sense of his unfitness for the work ; the fear of man, and the apprehensions that his labours will not be acceptable to the people, may torment his mind and sink his spirits. Now this is no fiction of the imagination, but a fact of common occurrence : and we would ask the sternest defender of punctuality, if the fulfilment of appointments, under such or similar circumstances, and without the prospect of temporal reward, is not a noble act of self denial ! And if, in such a case, a congregation were even disappointed, the defaulter is not entitled to be judged with forbearance ?

But although it is highly proper to recollect these manifold and severe temptations to remissness, still it can be shown, that there are considerations which, if duly attended to and permitted to have their full influence on the mind, would be more than a counterpoise to all discouragements ; and therefore, while the man who yields to no surmountable impediments in the fulfilment of his preaching engagements, is admitted to be worthy of high commendation, we would not be backward or sparing in the condemnation of those who disappoint congregations through sloth, lukewarmness, or cowardice.

The motives to fidelity in this duty, arise from the

consideration of its general practicability, the advantages resulting from punctuality, and the serious evils consequent on negligence.

In the first place, punctual fidelity in the fulfilment of preaching appointments is generally practicable. Difficulties, as has been stated, will frequently oppose; but they will rarely be such as skilful management and holy zeal will not surmount.

Cases of incapacitating sickness or debility, or of some serious domestic occurrence which forbids absence, must be allowed as exceptions: to these may be added, cases of extreme bad weather or extreme distance, especially when connected with delicate health. But all these being circumstances of comparatively rare occurrence, do not affect the general truth of our assertion; and even in most of these cases, by a little contrivance and effort, a substitute might be obtained, and the congregation thus saved from complete disappointment.

Before a person accepts a plan, he ought to consider whether his health or his peculiar circumstances will allow him to fulfil it. The evils of frequent omission or irregular attendance, are so many and great, that they whose circumstances will not permit them to be punctual, had better decline the work altogether, or at least wait for some favourable change in their condition.

Much of the blame of non-attendance on the part of local preachers, is often due to the injudicious formation of the plan which prescribes their Sabbath labours. This fault, whether it originate in

the local preacher himself, or in the person who constructs the plan, might be easily avoided. The former ought to make as true an estimate as he can of his opportunities and capabilities with respect to the times and places of his appointments, which he should communicate to the framer of the plan, before he commences with it ; and certainly the latter will be sufficiently considerate to feel it to be his duty to attend to all reasonable suggestions of this kind.

It cannot for a moment be admitted that the local preacher is authorized to dictate to the superintendent universally as to *where* and *when* he will preach :—if such a practice were generally prevalent, the task of framing a plan would not merely be embarrassing, as it is now said to be, but utterly impracticable: but in regard to places which he may think unreasonably distant, or seasons in which other engagements are foreseen to interfere, it is his decided right to pass his *veto*. When he can assign solid reasons either for or against visiting certain places or preaching at certain times or hours, he is entitled to be heard ; and to be silent in such cases would be inexcusable, as it would be obviously improper to disregard his communications.

This previous inadvertence, whether of the framer of the plan, or the local preacher himself, is justly chargeable with the guilt of the omissions it occasions, though at the time they may be unavoidable.

He who is entrusted with the formation of a local preacher's plan, is charged with no trifling respon-

sibility. If judicious circumspection be not exercised, two evils will rarely fail to be the result; the preachers will have unnecessary labour imposed upon them, and there will consequently be many neglects. For it will be admitted that that system of planning which is the least laborious, will be attended with the fewest omissions. The geographical situations of the preachers ought to be carefully considered, together with their talents, and bodily strength; and as far as it may not be inconvenient—their predilections also, as well as those of the people.

But the most effectual guarantee, and the only sure basis of punctuality, is that ardent love of souls and deep sense of the importance of the work which always springs from deep piety. “The spirit of *power*” invariably accompanies “the spirit of love.” And the power of divine love in enabling the soul to surmount difficulties, is indescribably great. In its influence it is soft and gentle, like the breeze which fills the expanded sail; yet irresistible is its energy. No earthly motive can be compared to it. It is more pure, disinterested, lofty, and independent of external circumstances. Behold its influence on the mind of the great Apostle! It carried him through “labours more abundant.” “I can do all things,” says he, “through Christ which strengtheneth me.” “Charity endureth all things;” it turns crosses into pleasures; it makes crooked places straight, and rough places plain; it enables us “to glory in tribulation.” We will venture to affirm, that a local preacher who

enjoys a large measure of this pure affection, will never be stigmatized with unfaithfulness in regard to the fulfilment of his preaching appointments. But it is no matter of surprize, that he who is deficient in this essential point, should often be successfully tempted to negligence; for, having little stimulus from ambition, and none from avarice, he must often be left without a motive.

The mischief resulting from the wilful non-fulfilment of appointments, is acknowledged by all thinking people, to be extensive and deplorable.— There is, first, the pain of disappointment it occasions to every serious hearer. And it is not on his own account merely that he suffers; his bitterest grief is for the rest of the congregation. Probably he has with difficulty persuaded some friend or neighbour to accompany him to hear the sermon; and, when no preacher appears, he feels himself in a predicament which every one dislikes to be in. Perhaps he observes some persons present who are rarely to be seen in a place of worship, and whom he could wish exceedingly to hear a faithful sermon, in hopes that if it did not prove the means of their conversion, they might thereby be induced to continue their attendance; but the faithless preacher frustrates his hopes. Perhaps in the countenances of almost all the congregation he observes symptoms of disappointment; and thus, in addition to his own disappointment, he participates in the pain of all the rest. In this manner numbers in every neglected congregation will be affected. After waiting in uneasy expectation for half an hour, a resi-

dent preacher, (if there be one), takes up a heavy cross—that is, of preaching to a disappointed congregation, and without previous preparation ; and in some cases the services are left to be conducted by persons who are inadequate, or who painfully feel themselves inadequate to the task.

But the uncomfortable feeling which the non-appearance of the appointed preacher generally occasions, is the smallest part of the mischief : the *loss* is more serious than the pain ; that is, the loss of spiritual profit which might reasonably be expected to have resulted from the sermon.

That is a poor sermon, indeed, which is beneficial to none. The states and tastes and capacities of hearers, are so diversified, that it is incredible that a preacher of ordinary abilities can discourse for half an hour without advancing something from which every one in the congregation might not derive some advantage. If it be a learned sermon, it may instruct the well informed ; while the ignorant will be edified by a plain and even blundering discourse. Perhaps the preacher may be inanimate and awkward in his manner, yet his sentiments may be rich and his arguments powerful ; his sermon will therefore be valued by the cool and sober part of his hearers. Possibly he may have little to communicate ; yet the susceptible may be roused by his zeal, and affected by his touching manner.

Now the possible loss which may be occasioned by a single omission is incalculable. It is not improbable that if the preacher had been faithful to his duty, he might have been instrumental in turn-

ing some sinner from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Let this fact be contemplated in all its bearings and results :—"He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins"—not the sins of that individual only—but *a multitude of sins*, which others might have been led to commit through his example and instigations. But the opportunity of doing so great a work is wilfully cast away. *That* sinner is left to pursue his career of vice, vile and miserable himself, and corrupting all around him by his influence, for "one sinner destroyeth much good." And where shall we find the end? or how shall we compass the extent of the mischief of *one* omission?

But if such endless and fatal consequences may result from a single act of desertion, how fearful must be the sum of evil which will result from *all* the instances of negligence which are occurring every Sabbath day!

It may be said that those preachers who are in the habit of deserting their congregations on trivial pretences, are not the men from whose preaching much good can be anticipated. But this consideration, apparently plausible, amounts to nothing. It neither diminishes the guilt of the preacher nor the loss of the hearer.

But the most melancholy effect of remissness in attending appointments, remains to be noticed; that is, the injury it inflicts on congregations with regard to their regularity and frequency of attendance. It may be admitted, that from this mischief

those will be safe who have a settled conviction of the importance of public worship. Nevertheless, some of these may be young, and far from being established in grace ; and we should be unwarranted in believing that all these are perfectly out of danger from this quarter. The devil, we know, neglects no circumstances that can be turned to the disadvantage of religion, and into an instrument of temptation. Their disgust at what they may, think the carelessness of preachers whom they had been taught to regard as “ ensamples” may, by imperceptible gradations, terminate first in negligence, and finally, in a total dereliction of the house of God.

But it must be remembered, that the majority of almost every congregation is composed of persons whose convictions of duty enter but slightly into their motives for attending Divine worship. These persons, on the highest calculation, will be as irregular in their attendance as the preachers : it cannot be expected that they will be proof against repeated disappointments ; and it may rationally be expected that they will abandon a place of worship altogether, when they are always uncertain whether they shall hear a preacher or not. It is an undeniable and a lamentable fact, that many congregations have been injured, scattered, and ruined chiefly from this cause.

It is unfortunate also, that those congregations which are the most neglected by preachers are usually those, who from their circumstances, suffer the most from such neglect. Places that have abundance of preaching, and many resident local

preachers, cannot be much affected by an occasional omission ; but these have rarely to complain of omissions. But where there are none on the spot to supply the default of the preacher, or to supply it efficiently, his absence is felt to be a serious evil. And such are the places from whom complaints of the negligence of the preachers usually issue.

It has also been said, that neglect of appointments occurs with most frequency among that class of preachers who rank the highest in point of talent. We cannot undertake either to affirm or contradict this opinion. If true, it is certainly not very easy to be accounted for. It seems strange that a man should decline in fidelity as he rises in responsibility. Nevertheless it is certain that the omissions of such men, when they do occur, involve them in greater guilt than those of men whose talents are inferior ; in as much as they usually disappoint larger congregations, and occasion them greater pain by the disappointment ; and the probable loss resulting from their absence, is great in proportion to the talent with which they have been intrusted.

But among the characters who suffer from remissness in the duty under consideration, the defaulter himself must be numbered ; and his share of the mischief is doubtless the largest. In the first place, his ministerial unfaithfulness is deeply injurious to his personal piety : it robs him of the peace of an approving conscience—the joy of a smiling God. It enervates the vigour of his spirit, cherishes sloth, and indisposes him for discharging every other christian duty.

Wilfully to disappoint a congregation—apart

from its mischievous consequences—is a positive breach of engagement, both towards God and man. When a man accepts a call from the Supreme Head of the church to preach the Gospel, he either does or ought to engage faithfully to occupy the talent committed to his trust, until the coming of his Lord, and assiduously to cultivate that portion of God's spiritual vineyard that shall be allotted to him. A person, also, who accepts a local preacher's plan really, if not verbally, engages to fulfil its appointments as far as he is able.

But he who trifles with his work, and on light grounds omits his appointments, violates these sacred engagements; consequently, he will deeply grieve the spirit of God, who will therefore withdraw that gracious influence which is essential to his spiritual prosperity. An indolent preacher, we may affirm, *cannot* be a fervent or an eminent christian.

Farther, the defalcations in question will impair his christian and ministerial reputation, and consequently deprive him of that influence and authority which undoubted piety invariably gives, and which are indispensable to the success of his preaching.

And certainly a negligent preacher cannot complain of uncharitable treatment, if his piety should be suspected. For how can any one believe him to possess that zeal for the honour of God, that love of souls, and that high valuation of opportunities of usefulness which are essential to the character of a true christian minister? And if they must believe these qualities to be absent or defective, how can they help believing him to be defective in true piety?

CHAPTER XI.

On the Office of the Wesleyan Local Preacher.

THE affairs of civil government could not be carried on with proper regularity and dispatch, if they were not distributed into separate departments, and to each limits prescribed, and peculiar rights and duties attached : and he who should be placed in a civil office, without knowing its boundaries, or its relative position with regard to precedence, or subordination, would be in danger of straying out of his sphere, and of interrupting the order and progress of business. This classification of duties secures their more effectual performance, not only by excluding disorder, but by allowing an adaptation to the varied abilities of those who engage to perform them.

The apostle considers the different official characters in the Church as the various members of one body ; and by this beautiful comparison, illustrates the necessity of each endeavouring to perform his own peculiar duties, without envying the honour, or assuming the functions of others.

Methodism is, with singular propriety, called a body, because its various offices have a mutual and a vital connexion with each other. In this body, local preachers constitute a member, which, if not the most dignified, is certainly one of the most use-

ful. Occupying as they do, a separate and distinct position in the economy of that connexion, it is on several accounts desirable, that they should entertain enlightened views on that particular subject.

There is nothing in the New Testament to invalidate or discountenance the properly regulated services of laymen as preachers or teachers of the word of God. Nevertheless it was evidently the intention of our Lord to entrust the ministry chiefly to an order of men set apart for the purpose : this intention he significantly intimated by discharging his disciples and first apostles from their secular engagements; and in the writings of Paul his will on that subject is stated in the most explicit manner. If additional evidence were necessary for the establishment of this point it might be observed that a regular and remunerated ministry accords with the constitution of the Jewish Church, and even with the common sense of all nations, for every system of idolatry has its priesthood. And in the present degenerate state of mankind, it does not appear that religion could maintain itself in the world by any other existing means; such is the corrupting influence of worldly business, and its tendency to impair the spirituality of the mind.

If then, the ministry be designed to exist in a certain order of men as a separate office, common propriety requires it to be distinguished by some special duties and privileges. Ministers generally disclaim the exclusive right of preaching the word; the rights of governing the church, of administering the sacraments, and of exemption from the ne-

cessity of engaging in secular pursuits, must therefore be left them as the badges of their office.

Many considerations, indeed, combine to shew the propriety of a lay preacher confining himself to pulpit exertions : his necessary studies as a preacher fully occupy the leisure that business leaves him ; the superaddition of pastoral duties would impose a burden upon him, which it would always be inconvenient and often impossible for him to bear. And farther, the assumption of the pastoral character by laymen is *unnecessary*, so long as the Church continues to provide itself with an order of men wholly set apart for the work, and whose superior education, experience, and official sacredness, particularly fit them for it.

It may be thought, that no more piety or wisdom is requisite for the pastor than the preacher ; and yet it will be allowed that many are acceptable in the latter capacity, who would not be regarded with proper veneration in the former.

If a layman possess that union of piety and talent which unquestionably verifies his call to the preaching department of the ministry, it might be difficult to prove him unfit for the exercise of any ministerial function ; still that same person, with precisely the same moral and intellectual qualifications, if disengaged from business, and wholly devoted to the work, would have a much deeper hold on popular veneration, and consequently be able to exert a more influential authority in the pastoral character. Always associated as the idea of the pastoral office has been with that of sanctity and religious rever-

ence, common people find it difficult to disunite them ; nor is it desirable that they should be able to do so. As *official* authority seems to be requisite to the effective exercise of pastoral jurisdiction ; in like manner *official* sanctity appears to be required in the performance of the symbolical rites of our holy religion : for as the sanctity of the sacraments is symbolical, or representative, so also is the sanctity of the ministerial office :—the one represents the sublime mysteries of religion, the other, the utmost purity and dignity which can be associated with human character ; they have consequently a very proper correspondence to each other.

The ministry of lay preachers is not then to be regarded as independant or complete in itself ; but as only furnishing an auxiliary agency, or constituting a part of a whole, as a member may form part of a body.

The Wesleyan local preachers cannot be considered as having a corporate existence, separately considered ; for they teach no doctrines, exercise no authority, enjoy no privilege, and claim no churches or congregations distinct from the Itinerancy. They have, in fact, no government of their own, and consequently no public tribunals or functionaries. All the authority they possess as preachers, is that which they justly exercise in the reception or expulsion of members of their own body. Beyond this they have no need for any government, or separate constitution ; since they have no separate interests to guard or to lose. All that they ask is permission to preach the Gospel, without

any temporal remuneration; and this cannot be denied them without the concurrence of a majority of the local preachers assembled in the regular meetings of the circuit, and without a similar concurrence, none who are already engaged can be excluded from the work.

It may, however, be proper to observe, that the authority to co-operate with and assist the superintendent in the discharge of pastoral duties, and the administration of discipline which is properly enough detached from the office of local preacher, is committed to another order of spiritual officers, named *leaders*. The former is to be considered as furnishing an assistant ministry to the Itinerancy so far as preaching is concerned, as the latter furnish, a subservient aid in the pastoral department of their office. Thus both leaders and local preachers move in distinct but highly useful spheres. The leader by the intimate acquaintance that he has an opportunity of obtaining, relative to the character and spiritual state of the flock over which he is placed, is peculiarly fitted to be an adviser to the pastor in all matters of government and discipline, and in convocation form a popular tribunal, by the authority of which, under the presidency of the pastor, members are admitted or excluded; while the local preacher, unburdened with the pastoral "care of the churches," is at liberty to turn his whole attention, as far as temporal duties will allow, to acquire the necessary ability for occupying the pulpit.

United, then, as the travelling and local preach-

ers are in administering the word of life to the same people, and yet in many respects two distinct bodies, it is highly desirable both for their own honour and usefulness as well as the people's good, that unanimity of sentiment and cordiality of feeling, should subsist between them : and it is a gratifying consideration, and matter of thankfulness to God, as well as very creditable to both parties, that this mutual cordiality has for so great a length of time been so generally maintained ; and while the same good sense and piety shall be retained that has hitherto characterized both these classes of preachers, no fears need be entertained of its serious interruption.

Indeed, these two bodies are so happily adjusted to each other, and exposed to so little influence which might attract them out of their own orbits, that it is no very easy thing for them to come into hostile collision. They have no separate or clashing interests ; nor are placed in the position of rivals, and cannot therefore be affected by the jealousies of rivalry ; while the cultivation of mutual good will is so obviously the interest of both, that it will never be neglected, except by those who unite uncommon ignorance with inveterate self-will. Faction would be as unserviceable to the one, as arbitrary measures would be to the other ; and both faction and oppressiveness are equally calculated to lower the character in the eyes of the people. All that the local preacher asks of the travelling preacher is, the gratitude and respect which his gratuitous assistance is fairly entitled to, and all

that the latter expects from the former, is cordial co-operation, and that deference which is due to the pastoral character; and both these demands are so moderate and evidently just, that they will never be withheld except by those who are deficient either in piety or good sense.

It is highly important that lay preachers should be aware of their responsibility as members of a particular branch of the general church. To the doctrines, institutions, and ministers, of their own church, they are bound to give their warmest support. Common consistency, as well as public good, demands this even of private christians. For however justly sectarian zeal may be condemned, yet the manifestation of cold indifference to the prosperity of the cause which we profess conscientiously to espouse, is much more absurd, criminal, and mischievous. That is false charity, and betrays unsettled principles, if not a want of good sense, which pretends to make an *equal* distribution of its regards among all religious denominations. The subject of such wondrous liberality will rarely be an efficient friend to any, and generally despised by all. If we believe the doctrines held by our own party, as well as their forms of Church government and discipline, more accordant with Scripture, and practically useful than those of any other sect, then—though we must cherish kindly and candid feelings towards all—the cause which our judgment thus pronounces the best, is entitled to our best affections and our undivided support. A catholic spirit we warmly admire; yet a catholic spirit may

be combined with this specific decision, and without such a combination, it is an empty name.

Now the cultivation of such a disposition, and the display of such conduct as is here recommended, is peculiarly binding on local preachers. Their great numbers in the Wesleyan Connexion,—for instance—and the influence attaching to their ministerial character, renders them one of the principal pillars of that church.

Brought by their public duties into frequent contact with the people, they possess opportunities of extensively disseminating their opinions: while their public character, and their disinterested labours will—on some subjects, at least, and with some people—give their opinions weight.

This influence they are bound to exercise with conscientious fidelity and circumspection. The character and office of the ministers who are duly appointed to labour among them, they should hold sacred, and in them ever find a warm friend and hearty defender; nor ought it to be a trifling matter that should induce them to assume the attitude of resistance to pastoral authority; and if in any case resistance is obviously necessary, even then it must be of a temperate and constitutional character and accompanied with the utmost delicacy towards those whose office and station renders them sacred.

Allusions to the *disinterestedness* of their own exertions, particularly in public, a slight consideration will shew the propriety of avoiding, for we know not in what manner such allusions can operate to the advantage of the speaker, when those that

hear him are already aware of the fact; and it is not difficult to believe they might operate perniciously on a narrow minded class of hearers, especially if accompanied by the indication of any wish to disparage the regular ministry merely on that ground.

To betray any disposition to grudge or envy the salaries of those who are wholly devoted to the work, would, for obvious reasons, make us contemptible, and quite spoil the grace of our gratuitous exertions.

SUPPLEMENTARY AND CONCLUDING

OBSERVATIONS.

IT has been demonstrated in the preceding pages, that *every* lay preacher whose capacity and opportunities of improving it are of that kind which are usually possessed by working people, may by prudent, diligent, and persevering application, obtain an accurate acquaintance with theological subjects, and a considerable share of such general literature as is most useful to a preacher, together with that skill in public speaking which will enable him to deliver his sermons with propriety and effect. It has also been assumed as an unquestioned fact, that every local preacher, whatever may be his condition or capacity, may become possessed of fervent, blameless, and exalted piety. These two facts we would strongly recommend to the consideration of those who are disposed to lay the blame of their comparative imbecility and uselessness on the disadvantages of their external condition. And we would further remind them that these attainments may be made without any serious sacrifice of personal comfort, without any prejudice to business, without any violent efforts; nothing more is demanded than *moderate* industry, guided by prudence, and sustained by persevering fortitude. And such a union of study with business, so far from

rendering life uncomfortable as some might suppose, would furnish some of the most exalted enjoyments of life. The hours of recession from business, which often hang heavy upon the idle, would on such a system, be occupied in the most delightful, satisfactory, and useful manner. The individual would feel that he was living for some important purposes; not merely to provide for and pamper his body, but to improve his intellectual powers; not only to promote his own temporal interest, but to advance the best interests of his fellow creatures: these considerations would be attended with an inward satisfaction, which would far outweigh the personal discomforts resulting from study.

There are amongst local preachers numbers who exhibit this delightful union of elevated piety with considerable talents and learning. And we would ask, why are not such characters more numerous? Why are not the majority of local preachers of this description? All will grant that what has been attained by one, may be attained by every other, who is possessed of similar faculties and opportunities. But when persons of more than ordinary talents are referred to, it is common to hear them described as *gifted*; by which is commonly meant, that they have received their endowments by a special communication from heaven. Nothing is more common than for ignorant people to think, that all superior minds are born with that superiority, and that it would therefore be hopeless in them to aim at their acquirements: but there are few

vulgar mistakes more radically or generally erroneous. Without denying that there are a few minds naturally above and a few below the ordinary rank, it is certain that the original capacity of most is very nearly equal. Most of those who are termed *gifted* individuals would readily acknowledge, that if they had not submitted to severe and unwearied industry in the improvement of their minds, they should have remained among the undistinguished crowd, and never have been seen on the eminence they now occupy; and when the private history of talented men is given us, we always discover that they have been as superior to other men in industry as they are in attainments; that they have not ascended the hill of science by a supernatural energy and a sudden flight, but by a slow and laborious process; that they have experienced the usual difficulties, and adopted the usual expedients, which mark the frailty and weakness of the human mind.

In the list of superior minds, perhaps the better half had originally no more genius than that which men in general possess; and many have been known to possess faculties which, in the early part of life, were thought very unpromising, that have ultimately become celebrated; having supplied, by unwearied and vigorous application, what was denied them by birth, and demonstrated how productive even a barren soil will become under a skilful and spirited cultivator.

To confirm and illustrate these positions, we will suppose that two young men nearly similar in edu-

cation, age, piety, mental capacity, and opportunities of improvement, at the same time enter the ministry as lay preachers. One of them adopts the plan of self-improvement suggested in the preceding pages, or one equally efficient. All the time that can be spared from business, or rescued from unnecessary sleep and needless occupations, he diligently employs in the pursuit of spiritual and intellectual improvement, and suffers nothing to escape him that can contribute to these purposes. The other takes the path which is unhappily most frequented ;—that is, he adopts no *system* of improvement—writes nothing—studies only when compelled to it—reads when a book attracts his attention, or happens to fall in his way ; and then, either with sluggish indifference or eager rapidity and consequently in both cases with little real advantage ; while, at the same time, self-indulgence and want of prudent management, leave him, in reality, but little time for any mental pursuit.

Now suppose these characters to pursue their different courses for a *quarter* of a century, who does not perceive that their distance from each other in the end of that period must be almost immeasurable. The former would become a gifted individual ; the latter would still be undistinguished in the crowd. The mind of the one would be highly cultivated, and richly stored with knowledge ; that of the other, an unproductive waste. The pulpit talents of the one would become respectable, perhaps eminent ; the improvement in those of the other scarcely perceptible. The former of these

persons would resemble a traveller who had tasked himself to walk a certain number of miles upon an average every day, and though he moves slowly and by short stages, yet takes care to keep in the direct road, and steadily proceeds on his way, untrifled by difficulty, and unallured by pleasure; and always contrives to retrieve on smooth ground what he has lost on mountainous and rugged;—while, at the same time, he uses all the means in his power to make himself acquainted with the different objects that fall in his way.

The latter is like another traveller who loses the greatest part of his time in perfect inactivity, and when he does move, it is in an irregular and fitful manner; who takes no care to keep in the direct road, but is frightened or allured out of it by every difficulty or attraction; who stands to see every idle sight, spends whole seasons in the same spot where he happens to be entertained or gratified, and seeks rather to gratify an idle and giddy curiosity, than to obtain a philosophical acquaintance with men and things.

Now if both these travellers should set out together, the one would be able to travel all the world over, before the other had completed the tour of an island; while the knowledge which he would obtain would be as much more accurate and orderly than that of the other as it would be more extensive.—The mind of the one would be stored with the riches of a world; that of the other with the mere trifles of a region; and what was valuable in his store, would exist in his mind in jumbled confusion or imperfect fragments.

But from this comparison of the probable attainments of the two individuals thus contrasted, we may glance at their respective *usefulness* ; and here the disparity will be equally striking. If the first mentioned had taken as much pains to cultivate his piety as his understanding, he could not fail of being eminently useful ; for the Supreme Author of good rarely, if ever, fails to honour with his blessing the faithful exercise and improvement of talents. Besides the utility of his public labours, which would generally correspond with the extent of his piety and talents, his example would be a living and standing lesson to mankind, and a lesson from which they might not only learn their duty, but also derive motives for its performance.

The usefulness of the other would necessarily be very contracted, particularly if his piety were as stationary as his knowledge, which usually happens, and is indeed to be expected ; for he who is unfaithful in that which is least, will be unfaithful in much. A preacher who is at once lukewarm in religion, and deficient in ability for his office, is more likely to do harm than good ;—to make religion appear to disadvantage, than to exhibit it as highly desirable.

But let us follow these two characters to the judgment seat of Christ, for thither they must both be brought. How different will be the reception they will meet with there ! One will be able to say, “ Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds ; ” the other can only say, “ Lord, here is thy pound which I have kept laid up in a napkin ! ”

THE END.

